GUNS ’N GOLD KEEP CONGO IN CONFLICT

continued on page 7

By Donald Paneth

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. — The volatile situation in the Congo is of immediate concern here. Observers are referring to the warfare in the Congo as “a world war within a world war” because of the intervention of armies from Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

Three aspects of the conflict in which an estimated 3.5 million people have died since 1998 are central to an understanding of it.

First, there is the ethnic fighting in the resource-rich, northeast Ituri district; second, a continuing United Nations investigation of the illegal exploitation of Congolese natural resources; and third, the disastrous history of the Congo since it won its independence from Belgium.

“The ongoing strife in Ituri is a humanitarian catastrophe,” U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan reported to the Security Council last month. “Military offensives continue to cause widespread suffering. The illicit exploitation of natural resources has criminalized the conflict, making it all the more difficult to stop.”

Annan recommended that the military strength of the U.N. mission in the country be boosted to 10,800 troops and that its mandate be extended to June 2004. On May 30, the Security Council authorized the dispatch of 1,400 troops. The force would be deployed until Sept. 1, 2003. France, Pakistan and Nigeria specified a reservation, saying that the U.N. would have to pay the costs.

On June 9-10, 200 French troops arrived in Bunia. Soldiers of the Hema ethnic militia control the town beyond the compound’s perimeter. An estimated 430 persons have died in recent clashes between the Hema and Lendu ethnic militias. The Lendus have been expelled from the town.

That is the immediate situation on the ground.

At the same time, a U.N. panel of experts based in Nairobi, Kenya under Security Council direction is providing insight into the fundamental causes of the fighting. The panel is continuing its investigation of 85 multinational enterprises, 18 companies, and 54 individuals making deals in the Congo for its natural resources.

The operations of these parties have received scant attention in the international press.

Yet among the multinational enterprises whose activities are being probed are the Ahmad Diamond Corp. (Belgium), Barclays Bank (United Kingdom); De Beers (South Africa); First Quantum Minerals (Canada), Eagle Wings Resources International (U.S.); Kemet Electronics Corporation (U.S.); Trinitech corporation (U.S.); Naz Kazatomprom (Kazakhstan); Dara Forest (Thailand); Orion Mining (South Africa).

Congolese natural resources include oil and gas, copper, diamonds, coltan, gold, zinc, and cobalt. The U.N. panel explained in a report last October that the conflict was being fought not only over minerals but farm produce, land and “even tax revenues.”

Criminal groups linked to the armies of Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe and the government of the Congo have benefited from the microconflicts,” the panel said. “Those groups will not disband voluntarily even as the foreign military forces continue their withdrawals. They have built up a self-financing war economy centered on mineral exploitation.”

Elite networks and powerful individuals are exercising economic control over portions of the Congo, the panel went on. Their tactics are disguised to cover “high levels of theft.”

“Local militias and local politicians have supplemented the role that State armies previously played in ensuring access to and control of valuable resources and diverting State revenues,” the panel said.

“The looting that was previously conducted by the armies themselves has been replaced with organized systems of embezzlement, tax fraud, extortion, the use of stock options as kickbacks and diversion of State funds conducted by groups that closely resemble criminal organizations.”

Current events in the Congo are following closely upon those of the past. The Congo became independent from Belgium on June 30, 1960. In July, Belgian troops flown from Europe intervened in an attempt to protect Belgian interests in the Congo’s copper deposit at Bunia in the Ituri district. The Uruguayans are lightly armed, and may not fire unless attacked.

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STRAPHANDGERS URGE COURT TO REVERSE UN-FARE SUBWAY HIKE

Take the Appeals Train for a fare rollback say mass transit advocates.

PHOTO: FRED ASKEW.COM

By Janelle Lewis

Disaster! I can't afford it. I won't pay it," says one lifelong New Yorker about the city's recent bus and subway farehikes. He might not have to. A decision on the matter is expected later this month. On June 10, The Straphangers Campaign, the Automobile Club of New York (ACNY) and the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) presented arguments before a panel of judges of the State Court Appellate Division.

The MTA is appealing the May 14 decision by Supreme Court Justice Louis York to roll back transit fares from $2.00 to $1.50. "Today's victory is a victory for truth in government," Gene Russianoff told the Daily News when the verdict was announced. Russianoff is staff attorney for the Straphangers Campaign, a consumer advocacy group that filed the suit along with state Senator David Paterson (D-Manhattan).

The MTA is also appealing a June 4 ruling in favor of the ACNY made by Supreme Court Justice Robert Lippman. The ruling called for an end to the toll increases on bridges and tunnels and a refund of the increase to toll payers.

The two lawsuits were combined into the single June 10 appeal.

In the appeal, the MTA argued that it met all legal requirements in presenting to the public its budget outline and plan for closing a $1.8 billion deficit. The agency maintained that the deficit was real, supporting its assertion with a state comptroller's report – the source of its figure for the budget gap.

The MTA contests the findings of State Comptroller Alan Hevesi and City Comptroller William Thompson, who charged that the MTA engaged in deceptive bookkeeping to fake a deficit when it fact had a $83 million surplus. Justices York and Lippman affirmed the findings, ruling that the public notices and hearings held by the MTA intentionally misled the public by over stating the deficit as the primary justification for the fare hikes.

The MTA is retaining private lawyers from the firm of Proskauer Rose for as much as $400 an hour to defend its claims of poverty. "Since it is difficult to predict legal needs, it makes more sense for us to use outside firms for certain legal services than to employ a whole cadre of specialized in-house attorneys," MTA spokesman John McCarthy told The Daily News. The MTA claims it did not hide $512 million in surplus funds, but made a justified business decision to spread the remaining money from 2002 over future years, in part to pay debt and plug budget gaps. It also insists that the financial information it presented in public hearings was a summary of backup documents; it claims that the second set of books is really a master spreadsheet, simply a more detailed version of the plan used by the agency's staffers. They don't believe that they misled the public... What we see as deception, they see as multiyear planning," says Russianoff, who is confident that the Appellate Division will uphold the ruling.

WHEN BUSH COMES TO SHOVE...WHERE DO YOU TURN FOR NEWS?

Naomi Klein says The Independent "mixes the spirit of direct action with a searing critique of corporate power." Drawing upon the global network of Indymedia Centers, we let people speak for themselves – from the streets of Baghdad to the jungles of Columbia, the shantytowns of South Africa to the villages of East Timor. We look at those resisting the Pentagon and Wall Street reign of terror, from the fight at home for housing, quality education and civil liberties to the broader struggle against corporate globalization. Don't miss an issue – subscribe today!

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BUSH’S PUBLIC HOUSING PLAN: WRECKING BALL IN DISGUISE

BY CHRIS ANDERSON

A Bush administration proposal to effectively eliminate the Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly known as Section 8, is coming under fire from housing advocates and politicians across the country.

Most recently, New York City Council Speaker Gifford Miller and Council Member Margarita Lopez held a June 11 press conference to blast Bush’s so-called Section 8 “reform plan.”

“Section 8 Housing Vouchers are an essential tool for helping people put a roof over their heads,” said Miller. “We are . . . extremely wary of attempts by the Bush administration to ‘reform’ the Section 8 program in such a way to eliminate the same number of voucher recipients.”

In addition, NAHMA expressed concern regarding the structural difficulties in reforming a $13 billion federal program, and echoed the fears of Council Speaker Miller that “HANF could be the first step in de-federalizing or eliminating rental housing assistance altogether.”

According to the National Affordable Housing Management Association (NAHMA) in a recent study of the proposal. “States are currently having significant budget difficulties,” the study continued. “We are extremely concerned that the out from Section 8 reform will be similar to Clinton’s 1996 Welfare Reform act, including the acronym (welfare is now known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF).”

Many policy analysts fear that the fall-out from Section 8 reform will be similar as well. “We are extremely concerned that the HANF block grant, in any form, may not keep pace with the costs of providing rental assistance,” announced the National Affordable Housing Management Association (NAHMA) in a recent study of the proposal.

“States are currently having significant budget difficulties,” the study continued. “If they are given responsibility for serving the same number of voucher recipients,” HANF, and if the federal government does not sufficiently fund the program, it is unclear whether states would be financially able to continue serving the same number of voucher recipients.”

In addition, NAHMA expressed concern regarding the structural difficulties in reforming a $13 billion federal program, and echoed the fears of Council Speaker Miller that “HANF could be the first step in de-federalizing or eliminating rental housing assistance altogether.”

According to Miller, the Bush proposal contains “a provision that would allow state governments to end support for recipients of vouchers in 2009.”

Lopez bluntly noted that the economic consequences of the proposed Section 8 changes would be “devastating.” “If poor people have to pay more than 30 percent of their income for rents,” said Lopez, “not only will the city see an increase in evictions, [but] there will inevitably be an increase in homelessness.”

A variant of Bush’s plan is working its way through Congress. On April 29, Representative Bob Ney (R-OH) introduced HR 1841, the Housing Assistance to Needy Families Act (HANF) on behalf of the President. Senator Wayne Allard (R) later introduced a similar bill in the Senate.

“Imagine for a moment that they were devolving $5 billion in dollars to the states,” the Senator asked. “How would the states deal with it? How would they go about it?”

The plant would also help stimulate a huge burst of further development in Westchester and Putnam Counties, which in turn would decimate sensitive wetlands that have helped make the Croton watershed a source of clean drinking water for New York City and its northern suburbs for the past 150 years.

ANGRY WOMEN BASH BUSH

Activists gathered in the courtyard of St. Mark’s Church June 9 to level charges against the Bush administration. One by one women took the stage, each reading a charge against the administration’s policies.

Each charge ended with the words “Scream out!”, which signaled another woman on the stage to give her best scream. The screams varied from ear-popping wails and operatic scream-singing to a woman screaming in sign language.

SCREAM OUT was initiated by performance artist Karen Finley and organized by the Women’s Action Coalition. See www.wacnyc.net

BUSH IN NYC, GROUPS PLAN PROTEST

On June 23 President George W. Bush will be in New York City fundraising for his 2004 campaign. Outside the President’s location at the Sheraton Hotel (W. 52nd St. and 7th Ave) activists from United For Peace and Justice, and Planned Parenthood have planned a protest, beginning at 5 p.m. The New York Times estimates Bush will rake in a record $5 million at the fundraiser.

ACORN FIGHTS FOR HOUSING

Dozens of demonstrators from ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) entered the Newark Housing Authority June 6 in an action leading to a brief but tense standoff with local police.

Protesters were angered by the large number of applicants put on waiting lists as the city struggles to meet the growing demand for federal housing vouchers.

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BRIEFIN

CITY COUNCIL APPROVES WATER FILTRATION PLAN

In an action that allows the New York State legislature to move forward with a controversial Giuliani-era plan to build a massive underground water-filtration plant in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, the New York City council voted on June 13 to approve construction of the plant.

“Imagine for a moment that you were going to build a $1.5 billion project four times larger than the World Trade Center in the middle of Central Park,” argued Bronx Councilman Oliver Koppel in opposing the plan. “Do you think for a moment that anybody in Manhattan would accept that?”

The plant would occupy an area of eight to ten acres and house over 460,000 gallons of chemicals labeled “hazardous substances” by the EPA. Construction of the plant could take up to eight years and result in major disturbances for northwest Bronx residents in terms of continual trucking loads, heavy construction equipment and the displacement of thousands of rats.

The plant would also help stimulate a huge burst of further development in Westchester and Putnam Counties, which in turn would decimate sensitive wetlands that have helped make the Croton watershed a source of clean drinking water for New York City and its northern suburbs for the past 150 years.

PHOTOS: FRED ASKEW.COM

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Road Map to Nowhere

Israel shows its deadly “good will”

By Kristen Iss

GAZA STRIP JUNE 14 — The idea of a cease fire between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli military government is, of course, misleading. It suggests that there are two equal sides at war. Israel receives more than 12 million dollars a day from the United States to supplement its massive arsenal of destruction. It has not ended its illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. Nor has it ceased imposing curfews, building settlements, checkpoints and a towering apartheid wall around the West Bank and southern Gaza Strip, or using Apache helicopters, tanks and soldiers to kill Palestinians.

On June 5, for example, Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) assassinated five Palestinians in the West Bank near the city of Tulkarm. And as the “road map” talks continued, so did the Israeli attacks. Although Israel was under international law, on June 10 Israeli forces fired seven rockets from a U.S.-made Apache into a car, wounding their “target” — Hamas spokesman Abdal Aziz al-Rantisi — and killing a little girl and two other women who were on the street.

On June 12, IOF attacked Gazy City, killing seven Palestinians, including an infant. That attack was one in a four-day spree of extra-judicial killings by Israel. It has stepped up the attacks at Bush speaks of vigilance against Palestinian “terror-ism.” In just two days five such Israeli attacks killed 11 Palestinians, 18 of them non-targeted civilians.

These assassinations are carried out against Palestinians the Israeli government “suspects” of a crime, i.e., resisting the occupation. There is no trial, no evidence presented, no defense attorneys, no target period. It is war crimes.

On June 3, Israel released 100 out of more than 6,000 Palestinian political pris- oners its holding illegally. Most of those released were being held without charge or trial in “administrative detention” — a six-month sentence that the Israeli military can renew indefinitely.

A Palestinian journalist told me that among the released he spoke with in Ramallah, “most only had six or seven days left.”

The Israeli military government calls the releases a mark of its “good will.”

One of the released was a 23-year-old man taken out of his sleep at 2 a.m. six months ago. He was given six months detention without charge or trial. His sentence was up in a few days so he was released.

The release of Abu Sukar, who was imprisoned by the Israelis for 27 years, was a political gesture. He told the press, “I am happy to see my children who are grown now, my grandchildren, and all of my fami- ly, but this is not complete unless the whole country is free. There will be never peace until the children I raised inside the prison are also released.”

In early June, a few foreigners were allowed in, some working with the European Commission. They were greeted by Israeli gunfire as they passed through Beit Hanoun.

For the past several months the IOF has been destroying the northern Gaza Strip bit by bit — demolishing houses, displacing hundreds of Bedouins, ripping up orange groves, degrading the soil. The two Israeli settlements nearby are expanding. One of the women working for the European Commission told me, “Beth Hanoun is gone.”

Israel says that of roughly 200 illegal settle- ments, it will dismantle only 15. Only four of these are inhabited. The road map calls for dismantling all settlements erected since March 2001. Israel inserted the word, “unauthorized,” meaning settlements that the government considers illegal, ignoring the fact that all settlements in occupied areas are by definition illegal.

U.S. estimates are that 100 illegal settle- ments have been built since March 2001. Israeli settlements violate UN Security Council (UNSCR) 452 from 1979, which demands, “the Government and people of Israel to cease… the establishment, construction and plan- ning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.”

The resolutions have never been enforced. The settlements are referred to as dummy outposts used for public relations moves. Another empty gesture.

Israel said it would lift the closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip so that low-wage Palestinian workers can work for the Israeli economy. A local human rights worker said, “The Israelis have fired 20,000 imported foreign workers because they were too expensive.”

In addition to the occupation is to destroy infrastructure, farmland and local industry, in addition to making commerce and industry within the West Bank and Gaza Strip impossible. All of these actions create a devastating dependence on Israeli products and jobs.

In the same breath that Israel spoke of easing the closure, it also said that its sol- diers would remain in place. The day after the announcement, the IOF attacked Nablus and imposed a curfew on Ramallah. Soldiers were filmed beating residents in the streets. An man trapped at the Qalandia checkpoint reported via telephone that there were up to 200 Israeli soldiers, tankers, and Apaches. He said, “There’s nowhere to go to get away.”

Residents of Jenin and Nablus are still suffering under curfews. In just two days, 30 Palestinian homes were treated for bullet and shrapnel wounds, 12 of them small children.

This is happening amid “peace” talks. The road map itself is loaded with points that have been negotiated in the past, ones that the Israelis and Palestinians cannot agree on. This hasn’t stopped the U.S. and Israeli governments from telling Palestinians that there will be no right of return.

Last week a Palestinian journalist said he spent five hours traveling from Ramallah to Bethlehem, a trip that would normally take only 40 minutes.

He says, “Now there are more check- points than before this week. I think at least three or four new ones are now around Ramallah.”

I ask him why the Israelis are building more checkpoints. He replies, “When they want to show the world that they are imple- menting the road map, they will show pic- tures of themselves on the news removing these new checkpoints and the regular ones won’t be removed. They want to trick the world as usual.”

Israel is systematically destroying the economy, infrastructure and farmland of Palestine, pushing 75 percent of Palestinians into poverty.

The War on the Land

Length of Berlin Wall: 96 miles

Proposed length of Israeli’s wall around the West Bank: 700 miles

According to an interview Ariel Sharon gave to Yedioth Ahronot (625 miles)

Palestinian land seized or destroyed by Israel since Sept. 2000: 21,546 dunums — one dunum is a quarter acre (lawsocty.org)

Amount of West Bank that will be sealed to build the 30-foot-high wall: up to 10 percent

Houses destroyed since 1967 in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem: 10,000, including 6,000 since September 2000 (Global Campaign to Rebuild Palestinian Homes)

Israeli settlers in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem: More than 400,000

Palestinians currently being held in illegal Israeli detention camps: More than 6,000

International Law

U.N. Resolutions ignored or violated by Israel since 1948: 68

U.N. Resolutions ignored or violated by Iraq under Saddam Hussein: 16

Israel is the only country in the Middle East to have not signed, ratified or acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.
Brbery was a big part of United States strategy in its takeover of Iraq. Shouldn’t it matter?

Much was made in the alternative media of how the fall of the statue of Saddam Hussein was a staged event. Foreign news reports have also revealed that the so-called fall of Baghdad was a hoax.

None other than U.S. Army Commander Tommy Franks, the perpsand in a May 24 report that senior Iraqi military commanders were bribed not to fight by American forces in the Philippines. “I had letters from generals saying ‘I now work for you,’” he said.

The American strategy of bribery was corroborated in a May 26 Herald-Sun (Australia) article, in which former Iraqi officials claimed Hussein was “betrayed by three cousins, senior military officers and a former cabinet minister, in moves that allowed the fall of Baghdad.”

And a May 25 UPI report said that the French newspaper, Le Journal du Dimanche, named Soufiane al-Tikriti, head of the Special Republican Guard in Baghdad, as being paid several hundred thousand dollars by the United States to order his troops not to defend the capital.

April reports in the Asia Times and the Arab Voice first raised the issue, the latter calling the melting away of Iraqi forces, a “callous and brutal deed of efficiency.”

No doubt we should be glad many lives were saved and untold destruction prevented by the deal. No one is arguing with the Pentagon in The Independent, “bribing the senior officers was a cost-effective method of fighting and one that led to fewer casualties.” No one, for sure, is arguing with the virtues of corporate diplomacy.

But what about its downside – excluding, of course, the obvious historical propositions that have become the hallmark of the Bush administration? Shouldn’t this be a bigger deal? Did a compromise with Iraqi military bases, troops or facilities, that its oil fields were not torched as in the Gulf War?

One might also ask why Dick Cheney got his trousers in a bunch over late-March reports in the Toronto Star, Philadelphia Daily News, New York Times, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and the Miami Herald – to name a few – quoting him as saying, days before the attack, that “Saddam’s major bases of U.S. troops…would collapse like a house of cards.”

Or why his personal press secretary, dinner-jacketed, raced to Washington to call each of these news outlets in the first days of April demanding a correction to their reports (which she got).

Could the U.S. military “victory” become suspect in American eyes if it revealed that we paid the Iraqis to throw the fight? Possibly.

But most Americans don’t seem to care much about the war anymore – including those who relish the fact that President George W. Bush, who recently noted, the unscripted “peace from hell” lingers on, all bets – and secret deals – may be off.

By IMC STAFF

“I’ve heard many versions of the story,” Josefina Toledo (not her real name) says remembering the murder of her husband in 1991.

His killing came three days after the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos was ousted by the “People Power” revolution in 1986. Corazon Aquino rode into the presidency faced by a nation’s hope that democracy and independence would replace decades of repression and exploitation.

Those hopes were soon dissipated.

On January 22, 1991, the Philippines became the 20th nation of U.S. troops landed in January 2002 to the village and the military just opened fired on the whole town.” Toledo said.

“Anyone fighting for human rights was branded as a ‘rebels’ by the government,” commented Toledo, who is a women’s rights activist.

Fast-forward 14 years. Terrorism has replaced communism as the new enemy in the Philippines and around the world. But the victims remain the same: activists, Muslims and civilians.

On April 21, 2003, for instance, two human rights workers – Edén Mercallana, secretary-general of Karapatan (Rights)-Southern Tagalog, and Eddie Gumanoy, a peasant leader – were murdered on the road of Mindoro Island.

The Philippines is an archipelago in the South China Sea. The north is mostly Catholic and the south is Muslim. The Philippines were originally colonized by the Spanish in 1565. In 1898, the fledgling U.S. empire muscled its way in, killing anywhere from 200,000 to 600,000 over the next two decades. Consequently, Filipinos have had a historic aversion to foreign troops on their soil.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, the Philippines became one of the main fronts in the U.S.-led “war on terror.” A special deployment of 660 U.S. troops landed in January 2002 in Mindanao to eliminate Abu Sayaf, a “rebels” group that broke away from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the late 1990s and which is allegedly linked to Al Qaeda. (No evidence of this link has been supplied and most observers consider Abu Sayaf to be a criminal gang, not a political movement.)

This initial operation was named Balikatan 01-1 (Tagalog for “shoulder-to-shoulder”), and marked the first major joint U.S.-Philippines military exercises in the Philippines since U.S. military bases at Clark Airfield and Subic Bay Naval Base were closed in the early 1990s. Why we went – as well as why we’re leaving – makes the so-called Bush doctrine of “pre-emptive war” increasingly viable and palatable in the court of domestic public opinion.

The existence of a deal, however, may have given the lie to the supremacy of “War-Lite” in the face of a guerrilla war that continued long after the war, to what may lay ahead in Iraq.

Iraqis have already admitted resistance against the American occupation. Since Bush declared the end of “combat operations” on May 2, 47 American and Filipino troops have been killed in hit-and-run ambushes. U.S. Central Command has called for an increase in the number of troops in Iraq, now at 150,000.

The Roosevelt Willkie agreement may result in the deployment of nuclear forces to the Philippines, which is allegedly linked to Al Qaeda. It requires, ratified by a majority of the votes cast by the military are conducting joint exercises in which they fight side-by-side and train together.

That effort appears to be aimed at China, as outlined in a report by the RAND Corporation. Titled “The Role of South East Asia in U.S. Strategy Toward China,” the report, which was released in June, states: “China’s economic and military regional power over the next 15 years could intensify United States-People’s Republic of China competition in Southeast Asia and increase the potential for armed conflict.”

Another version is that the “rebels” in Southeast Asia and the Philippines, which is expressed by badly the nation’s laws.

According to the Nuclear-Free Philippines Coalition, the Philippines is the only one of the world’s nuclear treaty signatories that has national nuclear weapons in the Philippines, which is expressed by badly the nation’s laws.

A decade later, the Philippines government announced the intentions of the Bush administration. “Bush wants to reopen military bases that were closed.” And she worries that “More militarization in the villages will mean more Islamic guerrilla war with devastating consequences for all Filipinos.”

Bennett Baumer contributed to this report.
Robert Michael Smith’s "From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking and Unionbusting in the United States" is a welcome contribution to the historiography of American labor-management relations. Smith begins by chronicling the beginnings of the first professional strikebreaking agency, the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. By providing "guards" to "protect" replacement workers from striking Illinois miners in 1886, the Pinkertons’ first foray into strikebreaking proved very profitable. The Pinkertons probably remain the best-known strikebreakers today.

While their methods were brutal and primitive and (partially) successful, the Pinkertons’ activities illustrate just how influential the professional strikebreaker and unionbuster have been. Not only have they occupied a place in the labor movement, but they have also had a significant influence on the nature and process of labor organizing. The labor movement in the United States continued to advance, however, and by the early 20th century workers had achieved minimum governmental protections. Strikebreakers now had to look for new and subtler ways to influence the outcome of strikes.

Smith tells us that beyond simply providing "guards," professional strikebreakers also engaged in "labor discipline services" to mine owners in West Virginia, instituting "feudal-like control over their workers," harassing union organizers from "the time they stepped off the train until the time they left." The labor movement in the United States continued to advance, however, and by the early 20th century workers had achieved significant governmental protections. Strikebreakers no longer had to look for new and subtler ways to influence the outcome of strikes.

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From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking and Unionbusting in the United States
Robert Michael Smith
Oxford University Press, 2003

Reviewed by Tony Pecisnowsky

"Beyond providing ‘guards,’ professional strikebreakers have also employed armies of replacement workers ready to travel to any location at any time."

James A. Farley, known as the "King of the Strikebreakers," boasted of his roster of 35,000 transit workers to the New York City Interborough Rapid Transit company: "I will send for these men wherever they happen to be, and pay their fare to the strike center," he told the IRT. "I can reach them at a minute's notice any time." During the labor upsurges of the Great Depression, strikebreakers and unionbusters were ready to travel to any location at any time.

A history of strikebreaking is a valuable resource for anyone interested in economic and social justice.

Union Turns on Its Workers

By Sasha Nevskaya

Five 32B-J Service Workers International Union members came to their classes on the night of Feb. 28, only to find empty rooms. The teachers’ disappearance is only the tip of an iceberg in a messy underworld money battle.

The devoted players in this story include the Consortium for Workers Education (CWE), 32B-J and Local 2, AFT. CWE is a non-profit agency that provides training and education for New York unions and locals. CWE teachers unionized with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in 1993, and Local 2, AFT was subsequently founded.

Problems arose when 43 teachers were fired from their jobs at 32-B-J from Feb. 28 to March 6 without any notice. Some came to class and were escorted out of the 32-B-J building. Students were told that their teachers were sick. The fired teachers were then promised replacement jobs by the CWE management.

The spontaneous firing, followed by CWE rejection of further requests to meet according to their seniority within a week of lay-offs, violates four articles of the UFT-CWE contract, which expires June 30. After these events, the likelihood of making a new contract is in question.

For months Local 2 sought explanation from 32-B-J and CWE and support from UFT. "All we were getting was a deafening silence," says Local 2 official, Myles Ephraim. CWE was formed in 1985 and receives funding from New York State. Its city supporters include NYC Department of Employment and the United Way. CWE has its fair share of internal scandals. The founder Barry Feinstein is an expelled Teamster president accused of stealing $400,000 from the union. CWE also has a sad statistic of 90 percent part-time employment.

Every year CWE distributes grants among its member unions. Last year CWE gave 32-B-J $300,000 to run English as a Second Language programs and basic computer classes. 32-B-J Director of Benefit Funds, Mary Ellen Boyd, states in a letter to the IRT, "I can reach them at a minute's notice any time." The local in question is an educational resource for anyone interested in economic and social justice.
EURO-POWER
EU Emerges From Long Slumber

By DEBO QUIGGLE

BONN, GERMANY– Europe has awakened. Its post-Cold War slumber is ended. German-Franco apostasy from NATO may presage a brave, new Europe in the union of European nations.

As Germany’s slickest political problem, it is transmuted into “abused and joyless imitation of the United States of America” to be exhausted. Yet the true political nature of the beast slouching in Brussels remains ambiguous.

EU’s expensive common parliament with a president, a bill of rights, a common currency, a capital city, a flag, common license plates and passports, and a court – all the trappings of a European super-state increasingly capable and determined to pose the defiant alternative to Bush’s unilateralism.

EU optimists describe a creature born from the ashes of 1945 when Western European institutionalized the horror of war and determined to settle conflicts by peaceful means. And the EU, it seems, has become a symbol of a historical lesson painfully learned. Over interest rates was handed over to the unelected European Central Bank, while states were required to push through massive cuts in public spending in order to qualify for euro membership. Worse still, under the 1996 growth and stability pact their 1958, it served to hardwire neoliberal orthodoxy. The euro’s political and economic significance that they don’t stray from neoliberal orthodoxy.

EU realists point out that the cost and steel industries that had been the principal of a single European nation. Coal, steel and, later, atomic resources were to be shared among European nations once enemies. Thus, the realists, the EU is a bastion of commerce.

EU pessimists invoke Churchill’s call for a “kind of United States of Europe” during a 1946 speech at Zurich University. They recall the European Community and how it was formed in 1967 of various industrial entities: The European Coal & Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. The EC later evolved into the EU.

Traditionally, opposition to the EU stems from the far right parties, partly from British Conservatives. But recently, EU criticism has arisen from the left. Right and left EU critics argue that the EU is accountable only to career politicians, bureaucrats, big business and bankers. They are highly dubious about EU claims of democratic because their parliamentarians are not elected directly. Moreover, Alex Callinicos, speaking to the Socialist Worker of England, explains that the Treaty of Maastricht “served to hardwire neo-liberal economic policies into the EU. Control over interest rates was handed over to the unelected European Central Bank, while states were required to push through massive cuts in public spending in order to qualify for euro membership. Worse still, under the 1996 growth and stability pact their 1958, it served to hardwire neoliberal orthodoxy. The euro’s political and economic significance that they don’t stray from neoliberal orthodoxy.

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WATER CRISIS LEVEL RISING

BY DONALD PANETH

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. — Many of the world’s natural underground reservoirs, or aquifers, upon which 2 billion people depend for drinking water and irrigation, are under increasing stress.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warns in a recent report that water — its scarcity, conservation and the ways it is used — is a key issue for both rich and poor, developed and developing countries.

Over half the people in the world could be living in severely water-stressed areas by 2032, UNEP estimates. West Asia, which includes the Arabian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean countries of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine Territories, is likely to be the most seriously affected.

Even now, rapid population growth in some areas of that region is triggering water scarcities. Over 80 percent of the water is used for agriculture. Demand is outstripping supply, especially on the Arabian Peninsula.

Linked to water supply are the fates of three of the world’s megacities, whose populations exceed 10 million — Tokyo, Bangkok, Beijing, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Jakarta, London, Manilla, Mexico City, Shanghai and Tehran.

Rural areas can also be heavily dependent on groundwater. UNEP highlights rural India, where 80 percent of drinking water and 50 percent of irrigation water are brought to the surface from a network of 3 million hand-dug wells.

In some areas, an influx of seawater into underground aquifers is becoming a growing problem. Groundwater salinity in some coastal aquifers in Lebanon has risen in recent years from 340 milligrams per liter to 22,000 milligrams per liter.

The United States is not unaffected. In Arizona, 400 million cubic meters of water are being lost annually, which is about double the amount being replaced by rainfall.

Almost a fifth of the water in storage in the huge Ogalla/High Plains Aquifer of the Midwest has been removed. The water table there has fallen more than 100 feet in some areas and by as much as three meters and up to 30 meters in some places.

Brian Morris, principal hydrogeologist at the British Geological Survey and a participant in the report, said: “In managing groundwater, the fact that they are often easy and relatively cheap to tap is misleading. What is needed is pragmatic management, which includes reducing public awareness and support, community management, and encouragement of incentives and disincentives.”

UNEP observed that many potential improvements and remedies were politically and socially difficult unless long-term goals were adopted.

- Water makes up 60 to 70 percent (by weight) of all living organisms.
- The total amount of water on earth barely changes from year to year. The hydrological cycle of evaporation and precipitation circulates the earth’s water between the oceans, land and the atmosphere.
- Icecaps and glaciers hold 74 percent of the world’s freshwater. Almost all the rest is deep underground, or locked in soils as moisture or permafrost. Only 0.3 percent of the world’s freshwater is found in rivers or lakes.
- One in six people have no regular access to safe drinking water.
- More than twice that number (2.4 billion people) lack access to adequate sanitation facilities.
- In Africa, 300 million people live without basic sanitation and, with 1.2 billion people a year.
- Water-borne diseases are responsible for 80 percent of illnesses and deaths in the developing world. More than 2.2 million die each year from diseases associated with poor water and sanitation.
- Almost a fifth of the water in storage is used for agriculture. Unsanitary water, which provides a breeding ground for parasites, amoebas and bacteria, damages the health of 1.2 billion people a year.
- Almost three quarters of drinking water and 50 percent of irrigation water are brought to the surface from a network of 3 million hand-dug wells.
- Three-quarters of the 34 countries involved in the FTAA have reached only 15 of the 34 countries involved in the negotiations. “The Bush administration planned to spend $20 billion on its FTAA. No indication of the road ahead.”

FOOD

WTO AND SUBSIDIES: U.S. PUSHES GM FOODS

BY VANESSA HARDSKY

On June 20-25, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman will host 12 of the world’s largest for-profit seed companies in a so-called private sector summit on sustainable agriculture. The USDA plans to use the meeting to promote its biotech agenda, which includes strong support for genetically modified (GM) foods.

But millions of farmers around the world are opposed to the use of GM foods, arguing that they pose significant harm to local ecologies and biodiversity, as well as create serious water shortages.

Subsidizing farm products at home allows farmers to lower prices on exports and make the GM products competitive with non-GM products. For the developing world, however, this means that importing goods is often cheaper than producing them locally, which forces local farmers out of business.

So while the U.S. and EU look to the WTO to further open markets in the developing world, they are closing their own markets by skewing prices to their advantage.

“Any amount of money we put into our farmers’ hands, other world farmers become disadvantaged,” said Niel Ritchie, national organizer with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. “The U.S. has gone beyond everything it called for in trade talks for less restrictive trade systems.”

Perhaps the double standard the U.S. and EU employ will convince the rest of the world that the WTO is too flawed to succeed, as many of its critics argue it has already failed.

The Sacramento conference will serve up a good indication of the road ahead.

IN BRIEF

FEDERAL JURY FINDS 3 INS AGENTS GUILTY

Three Immigration and Naturalization Service agents were found guilty in a Federal jury in Houston on June 9 of depriving the civil rights of a Mexican national who sustained a broken neck while in their custody.

The historic verdict marks the first conviction of INS agents for civil rights violations in a federal criminal court.

In a 2002 house raid in Byran, Texas, Serafin Olvera sustained injuries when one of the agents performed a knee drop on his back. Olvera, who pepper-sprayed directly in the face for refusing orders to move. Olvera, 47, had lived in the United States since 1977. He suffered a broken neck and was left quadraplegic.

He was taken to the hospital only after the witnesses from the house raid had been deported back to Mexico. The father of five died 11 months later.

See more coverage: www.houston.indymedia.org

HOUSE PASSES AMENDMENT BANNING FLAG BURNING

By a bipartisan vote of 300 to 125, the House of Representatives has once again approved a constitutional amendment that would grant Congress the power to prohibit the public desecration of the flag of the United States.

The proposed amendment has gained new momentum in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

In order to become law, the Flag Amendment would need to be approved by the Senate and then two-thirds of the 50 states. While First Amendment defenders report they have a majority of state legislatures on board, the decision in the Senate is less certain.

Previous anti-burning amendments have died there.

YET ANOTHER BUSH COURT NOMINEE: UNDECLARED WAR?

With the New York Times and other mainstream media sources reporting a pending vacancy on the Supreme Court, a recent Bush-appointed Court of Appeals nominee has come under attack from pro-choice and women’s rights advocates.

According to NARAL Pro-Choice America, the nominee, Bill Pryor, “is stark evidence of President Bush’s determination to give conservative justices control over the lives of American women to freedom of choice.”

NARAL continues by noting that “Pryor personifies the essence of the Bush Administration plan to pack the courts with right-wing ideological. He is a committed anti-choice activist with a politicized view of the role of the courts.”

PUBLIC CITIZEN: FTAA NEGOTIATIONS REACH NEW LOW

Recent negotiations over the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) have reached a new low in terms of transparency and inclusive participation, Public Citizen said recently.

A “mini-ministerial meeting” at Wye River in Maryland will included only 15 of the 34 countries involved in the negotiations. “The Bush administration planned to spend $20 billion on its FTAA. No indication of the road ahead.”

“Now, though, the FTAA has become a real negotiation, with other countries making demands on the U.S. that are giving the administration political heartburn.”

By ALEX WILSON

The Sacramento conference will serve up a good indication of the road ahead.

Burkin Faso is $200.

The European Union also shares in the blame.

It spends $41 billion a year on agricultural subsidies, including cost 180 billion for GM food.

The U.S. government also threatened to impose sanctions against any country that regulates GM food, restricts or labels GM food or crops on the grounds that such restrictions were“ISSUES OF INCLUSIVENESS, TRANSPARENCY AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION.”

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There is a sense, however, that Bush administration officials are underestimating the power of the courts.

The White House has spent more than $190 billion on agriculture subsidies since 1977. It has also manipulated its power over agriculture to benefit its powerful constituents.

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