

RNC COP BUSTED! P3

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WHY 9-11 HAPPENED P11

THE INDYPENDENT

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Out with the Old

Bush's great Social Security hoax: the elderly
will suffer first, the young will suffer most
see Eric Laursen p6-7

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WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 120 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The Independent is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write for *The Independent*, film events and rallies, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

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Chinatown Goes to China

Chinatown's garment industry is an endangered species that will have to adapt quickly in order to survive.

The September 11 attacks, which closed Chinatown businesses for nearly a month, and rising real estate prices since the attacks forced many Chinatown garment factories to relocate to Midtown and Brooklyn. But a gradual reduction of tariffs on China's exports has lured even more of them to China.

BY LEIGH ANN CALDWELL

Peter Wong owns Bottoms Up 97, one of the few remaining garment factories in Chinatown. "It's horrible, this industry, it's going to disappear. We'll have all the manufacturing done outside of the country and one day, nothing's going to be made here."

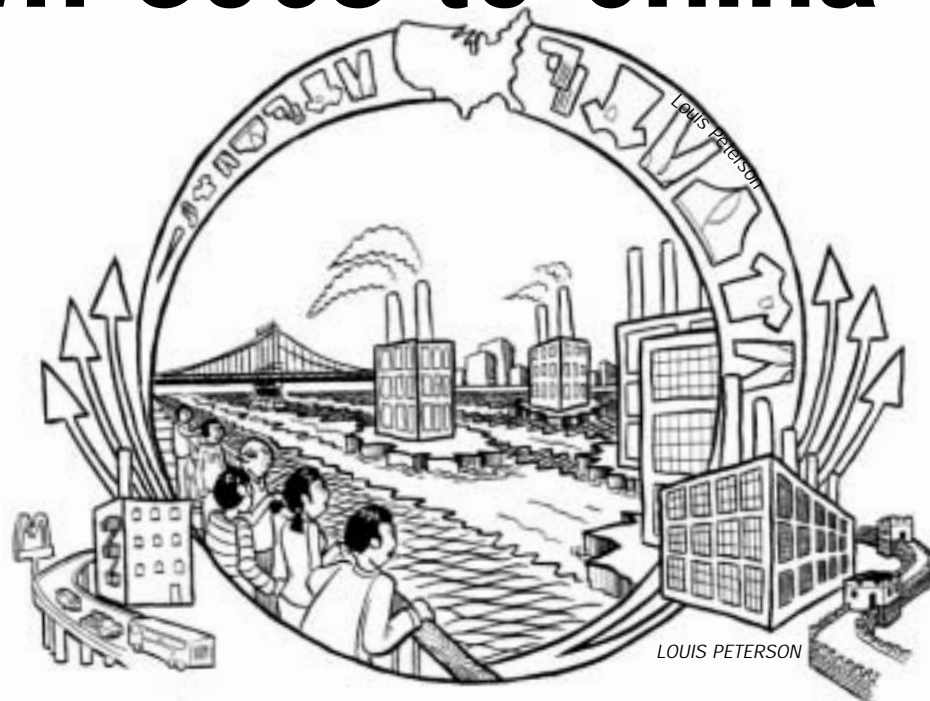
China's emerging dominance in the textile and apparel industry is expected to increase to the dismay of both domestic manufacturers and anti-corporate-globalization activists. On Jan. 1 the Agreement of Textiles and Clothing, which placed quotas on China's textiles at the time of China's entrance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, expired.

Cheap labor, cheap equipment and large profit margins make the textile and apparel industry one of the easiest industries to build from scratch — and one of the key steps in economic development in industrializing countries.

When China entered into the WTO, its government created favorable conditions for the growth of its textile and apparel industry. It kept the value of its currency low in order to spur the demand for garments at artificially cheap prices. The United States continues without success to try to persuade the Chinese government to allow the world market to decide its currency rates.

Robert Scott, an international economist at the liberal Economic Policy Institute, said the apparel industry is nearly unsalvageable. "I'm afraid that at this point, we have few options for manufacturers of apparel. I think it's the most vulnerable sector."

China controls 50 percent of the textile and apparel market, compared to 16 percent four years ago, according to the WTO. China's



exports to the United States are now five times more than U.S. exports to China.

The surge in China's exports to the United States is severely affecting Chinatown, which was once home to more than 500 garment factories in the nation. Chinatown has already seen 80 percent of its factories closed or relocated and more than 10,000 of its workers displaced, according to the Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC).

Mrs. Lee worked in China as a seamstress until she came to New York 15 years ago. She has worked at Bottoms Up 97 for nine years. "There is less work now. My hours are less now. With the less work it has impacted my family because my income has dropped." Many former seamstresses now work in home care or the hotel business.

LOOKING FOR THE UNION LABEL

UNITEHERE, the union that organizes and represents garment factories, has experienced a drastic decline in membership. UNITEHERE Local 23-25 had 28,000 members at its height. Today that number is 5,000.

Just as world markets are increasingly borderless, so are unions. They are looking to China to organize. "UNITEHERE supports unions around the world," said Mark Levinson, UNITEHERE's Director of Policy. "Manufacturing is one of the most global industries, organizing has to become global."

But Nancy Eng of the Chinese Staff Workers Association says that unions still need to focus on Chinatown precisely because of the migration of the garment industry from the neighborhood, and because some workers still endure sweatshop conditions.

"The garment workers in Chinatown are divided into two groups," said Eng. "One group is underemployed, while the other group is overworked" and receives low pay.

UNITEHERE says they are doing everything they can to save a shrinking industry. The union and a coalition of textile and apparel manufacturers asked the government to place safeguards on 12 products. They must prove that the elimination of the quotas threatens market disruption.

The Bush administration will decide whether that threat is valid. So far, safeguards have been placed on bras, socks, knit fabrics and gowns. The administration is expected to hand down a decision on the remainder of the safeguards in February.

UNITEHERE and the GIDC are attempting to emulate China's garment industry in Chinatown by establishing a "fashion place," a one-stop garment design and manufacturing center under one roof in Chinatown, where a designer will be able to select fabrics and have them cut, patterned, assembled and pressed into garments on site.

"We're forming a network into a seamless process. We'll work together instead of competing," said Kevin Chu, GIDC's Business Developer and Chinatown liaison. "It will cut down time, which is a key issue for Chinatown."

Chinatown's factories have been forced to cater to niche markets for new designers and high-end clothing based on fast turnaround for re-orders and samples. Wong said he "can never compete with China's prices, only with time. I'm still optimistic, it's just that the pie is getting smaller and smaller."

WHERE DO I GET MY COPY OF THE INDEPENDENT?

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May Day Books at Theater for the New City
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213 W. 13th St.

14TH TO 96TH ST.

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Second Wave Laundroceter
55th St. & 9th Ave.

Labyrinth Books
536 W. 112th St.

Kim's Books
113th St. & Broadway

Strictly Roots Restaurant
123rd & Adam Clayton Powell

Coogan's Bar
169th St. & Broadway

Fort Washington Bakery & Deli

808 W. 181st St.

Jumpin' Jalapenos
W. 207th St.
(between B'way & Vermilya)

Cafe Seven
7 Henshaw St.

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Green Apple Café
110 Dekalb Ave.

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680 Fulton St.

Halcyon
227 Smith St.

Moda Cafe

294 5th Ave.

Freddy's Bar and Backroom
Dean St. & 6th Ave.

BAM
30 Lafayette Ave.

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7th Ave. & Carroll Sts.

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9th St. @ 7th Ave.

Atlantis Super Laundry Center
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Jackson Heights Library
35-51 81st St.

Friend's Tavern
78-11 Roosevelt Ave.

Langston Hughes Library
100-01 Northern Blvd.

Café Aubergine
49-22 Skillman Ave.

Tupelo Bar
35th St. & 34th Ave.

Book Value
Broadway between 33rd & 34th Sts.

BRONX

Bronx Museum
165th St. & Grand Concourse

The Point
940 Garrison Ave.

JERSEY CITY
Five Corners Public Library
678 Newark Ave.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

The Indy's sex issue will hit the streets February 9!

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BUSTED!

D.A. INVESTIGATES COPS FOR 'FALSE RNC TESTIMONY'

BY DREW POE

In the first jury trial stemming from the mass arrests at the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, video and photographic evidence have shown some police testimony to be fabrications.

Judge Gerald Harris granted a motion to dismiss all charges against Dennis Kyne on Dec. 16, 2004, after the defendant's attorneys produced evidence contradicting statements that police officer Matthew Wohl made under oath.

Kyne was among several people arrested at the New York City Public Library on Aug. 31 during the RNC. Kyne originally faced a total of seven charges, including riot in the second degree, resisting arrest, and obstructing governmental administration. The riot charge was dropped before trial.

The motion to dismiss came not from the defense attorneys, but from New York County District Attorney Robert Morgenthau. Morgenthau's office brought the motion for dismissal after Wohl testified and the defense played a videotape for the prosecutors. Sources now say that the district attorney's office has launched an official investigation into the matter.

During the trial, Wohl asserted that he was present at the library as part of a mobile response team during the RNC. Wohl claimed he had seen Kyne yelling in a "boisterous" manner. On Sept. 1, Wohl also signed an accusatory instrument alleging that Kyne had shouted: "Look what they are doing. The government is taking away our rights. They lied to you; they lied to me." The document also asserted that Kyne yelled in a "violent and tumultuous manner."

Wohl testified that he personally arrested Kyne and that Kyne was "screaming, yelling, and moving around" during the arrest. Wohl claimed that Kyne dropped to the ground and that four officers (including Wohl) had to pick him up and carry him while Kyne "squirmed and screamed." Asked explicitly how Kyne had resisted arrest, Wohl stated that Kyne's "mouth, heart, and eyes" moved while he lunged around.

But videotapes and photographs of the events showed Kyne walking away from the library until two other officers grabbed him, forced him onto his knees, then applied plastic cuffs. None of the officers in the videotape or photographs is Wohl. Another officer in a white shirt then approaches and tells the arresting officers to charge Kyne with "Dis con [disorderly conduct] and resisting." During this process, Kyne is saying, "I'm not resisting." None of the events described by Officer Wohl are recorded; it appears that Wohl was not present and did not participate in the arrest.

Wohl also testified that he arrested four other people at the library, but in several of those cases the defendants insist Wohl was not the arresting officer. The evidence proving Wohl's testimony was false in Kyne's case also raises questions about the legitimacy of the other cases



A NYPD officer during the RNC. The NYPD made multiple massive arrests that don't stand up in court. PHOTO: STANLEY W. ROGOUSKI

involving Wohl. It is currently unclear how many total arrests Wohl is credited with during the RNC.

Kyne's attorneys expressed concern that Wohl's testimony may be part of a larger pattern. Attorneys Lewis Oliver and Gideon Oliver mentioned the possibility that police had used massive sweeps to round up large groups of people during the RNC, and then relied on officers like Wohl (who were not necessarily actually involved in the arrests) to provide testimony intended to legitimize the arrests. Wohl testified under oath that in preparation for the RNC he and other NYPD officers received extensive, convention-specific training throughout the year.

To obtain videotape and photographic evidence, Kyne's attorneys searched the large body of evidence collected by the National Lawyers Guild, which is involved in several lawsuits stemming from the arrests and detentions during the RNC. A Florida photographer snapped several images of the events at the library, and a videographer recorded the entirety of Kyne's arrest.

Sources familiar with the case have confirmed that the DA's office is investigating Wohl's role in the Kyne case and in the other arrests at the library on Aug. 31. Cherry Hunter, spokesperson for the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, said that she could not comment on the existence of any such ongoing investigation. Hunter also could not comment on whether there are any plans to pursue perjury charges against Wohl. At this time no charges have been filed.

video

Little Brother is Watching

BY CHRIS ANDERSON

While the identity of the videographer who shot the footage that freed Dennis Kyne remains uncertain, the story of how the tape ended up in court is a remarkable one. "A search for evidence led to a video which caught an image of a Florida photographer taking pictures of Kyne's arrest," says one source close to the case. "The person who filmed THAT video recognized the photographer and knew his name! So the photographer was contacted, and HE knew of the videographer who caught it all on film, and then HER tape was the one introduced at court. I think one more step would have led to Kevin Bacon, or something."

The introduction of the videotape once again demonstrates the growing importance of video activism in the legal arena. Videos shot by members of Indymedia and other media groups have been extremely useful pieces of evidence during activist trials.

GENOA, ITALY

The trials of Italian paramilitary police and anti-globalization activists in the aftermath of June 2001 anti-G8 summit protest in Genoa, Italy, have turned into a "battle of videotapes."

Both plaintiffs and defendants involved in the lengthy legal battles have produced video evidence in an attempt to implicate the other side. Italian authorities were so disturbed by the work of Indymedia during the Genoa protests that they staged a bloody raid on the Independent Media Center on the summit's final day.

F15 ANTI-WAR MARCH

A voluminous amount of video evidence accumulated during the February 15, 2003 anti-war march in New York City. It documented the aggressive behavior of the New York police department during the protest. Footage of police misconduct was screened by Indymedia videographers for the mainstream press in the days following the march, and footage has also been used at City Council hearings.



Critical Mass

Critical Mass riders lift their cycles to conclude the Dec. 31 ride through midtown. Five hundred cyclists participated in the ride on the heels of a court victory in which Judge William H. Pauley III ruled that cyclists don't need a parade permit to ride en masse. There was one arrest.

PHOTO: Caitlin Benedetto

REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION ARRESTS – THE SCORECARD

Out of the 1890 arrests, the National Lawyers Guild Mass Defense Committee has been tracking about 1700 of them. There are 186 cases that the Defense Committee has never received further information on; the defendants may have retained private, paid counsel.

Of the cases that have gone to trial, there have been:

WINS	LOSSES
Acquittals: 19	Convictions: 4
ACDs: Adjournments Contemplating Dismissal (not an admission of guilt)	Guilty Pleas: 78*
Dismissals: 308*	
No Charges Filed: 7	

* The number of dismissals includes the 227 people from the War Resister's League who had their charges dismissed by the DA after being shown videotapes of the arrests.

* 78 people chose to accept pleas in exchange for a reduction of charges from a misdemeanor to a charge of disorderly conduct which is only a violation, not a crime. This figure also includes people who were offered "time served" on their offenses, rather than having to return to NYC for future court dates. The original charges included resisting arrest, obstruction of traffic and reckless endangerment.

Open cases: 468

These are people whose cases still have not come to trial.

NEWS IN BRIEF

IRAQ: ARABIC FOR EL SALVADOR?

Newsweek has revealed that the Department of Defense is considering sending the Special Forces to Iraq to advise and train paramilitary squads tasked with killing or kidnapping insurgents and their supporters. The "Salvador option" dates back to the Reagan administration's sponsoring of "nationalist" death squads against leftists in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras. Current U.S. Ambassador to Iraq John Negroponte coordinated covert U.S. aid to death squads in Latin America as Ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s.

While the Pentagon reportedly hasn't made any decisions about whether to sponsor "counter-terrorist strike squads," the interim Iraqi government of Ayad Allawi is said to be among the strongest supporters of the "Salvador option."

CIA REMOVES RECORDS

The Central Intelligence Agency has been removing records from public collections in the National Archives, according to the minutes of a September 2004 meeting of the State Department Historical Advisory Committee. "CIA reviewers... claimed the right to remove documents from the open files that, in their view, had never been 'properly declassified.'"

CIA FUNDING FAILURE

An internal investigation by the Central Intelligence Agency's Inspector General has found that officials who served at the highest levels of the agency should be held responsible for under funding counter-terrorism efforts prior to September 11, say current and former intelligence officials. Among those most strongly criticized in the still classified report, the officials said, are George J. Tenet, the former intelligence chief, and James L. Pavitt, the former deputy director of operations. Both retired last summer.

DRUG WARRIORS DECLARED PROPAGANDISTS

The Government Accountability Office, the research and investigatory arm of Congress, has ruled that the Office of National Drug Control Policy's "video news releases" are "covert propaganda" and are in violation of federal law. The pre-packaged stories, broadcast as news on local television stations, reached over 22 million households. The news segments never revealed that the reports on the Office of National Drug Control Policy were filmed by that same agency.

FBI BLACKS-OUT GITMO

The ACLU has released documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act showing the FBI's investigation into "aggressive" interrogation techniques at Guantanamo was sharply scaled back and that records related to the FBI's investigation are still being withheld from the public. Accompanying one heavily blacked-out document is an FBI summary of "potentially relevant criminal statutes." The statutes mentioned pertain to war crimes, torture, aggravated sexual abuse and sexual abuse of a minor or ward.

FDA DEFENDS CORPORATIONS

In a reversal of previous policy, the Food and Drug Administration has spent over 600 billable hours since August 2001 defending drug companies who are being sued in state courts. Daniel Troy, Chief Counsel for the FDA, actively solicited private industrial company lawyers to bring him cases in which the FDA could intervene. Troy resigned in November 2004.

Beantown's Housing Battle

Losing Rent-Control Battle, Boston Tenants Organize

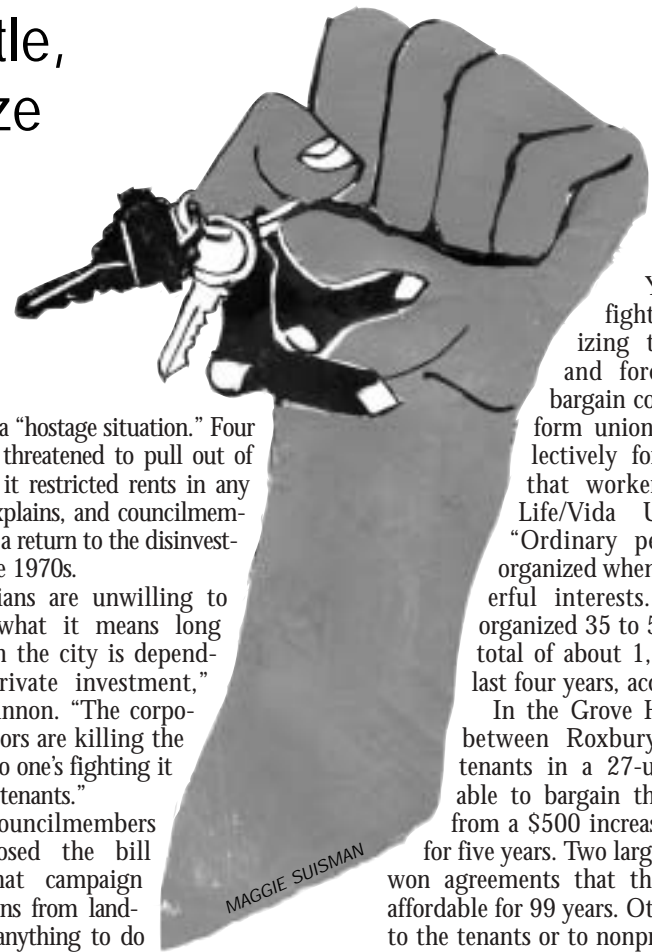
BY STEVEN WISHNIA

Boston's City Council defeated a plan to rein in rent increases on Dec. 8, the second time it has rejected new rent restrictions since a statewide referendum abolished rent control in 1994. Yet tenant activists in the city have developed a creative set of strategies to cope, including collective bargaining with landlords.

The council voted eight to five against the Boston Community Stabilization Act, a measure initiated by the Boston Tenant Coalition, that would have allowed tenants to appeal excessive rent increases. As the council defeated a similar measure in 2002, and the 1994 law says local governments in Massachusetts can't regulate rents without permission from the state legislature, the chances for restoring rent control in Boston are slim to anorexic.

"Despite the loss, there's still momentum," says Roxan McKinnon, assistant coordinator of the Boston Tenant Coalition, an alliance of 70 housing and community groups. "The response has been a lot more activity."

The most overwhelming reason the council rejected limiting rent increases, McKinnon says — in a city where rents have roughly doubled in the last decade — was that large landowners have



the city in a "hostage situation." Four developers threatened to pull out of the city if it restricted rents in any way, she explains, and councilmembers feared a return to the disinvestment of the 1970s.

"Politicians are unwilling to question what it means long term when the city is dependent on private investment," says McKinnon. "The corporate investors are killing the city, and no one's fighting it except the tenants."

Two councilmembers who opposed the bill denied that campaign contributions from landlords had anything to do with their votes.

Foes of rent control argued that it was unnecessary because rents are no longer rising in Boston. That's wrong, tenant organizers say; rents for luxury apartments have dropped slightly, but people in working- and middle-class neighborhoods are getting slammed with increases of up to \$1,000 a month.

The pressure is strong on the front lines of gentrification in the neighborhoods a few subway stops south of downtown: Roxbury, Boston's historically black community, where the teenage Malcolm X lived with his older sister; Dorchester, where wood "three-decker" houses once inhabited by Irish and Jews are now home to Haitian and Latino immigrants; and Jamaica Plain, known as "J.P.," a multiracial, mixed-income area with a strong history of activism. Mark Pedulla, a tenant organizer with City Life/Vida Urbana in Jamaica Plain, rattles off a series of rent increases in buildings in Roxbury's Egleston Square area but advertised by realtors as in Jamaica Plain: from \$600 to \$800, from \$700 to \$1,200, from \$850 to \$1,625. In one building, long-time tenants paying less than \$500 for three-bedroom apartments were told to pay \$1,800 or be evicted.

The irony, organizers note, is that many of the people being hit with these rent increases have been active in working to improve the neighborhood, by volunteering in schools or trying to get drug dealers off their block. If they succeed, property values rise, inviting gentrification, so "as a result of their activity, they get driven out," says Steve Meacham, City Life/Vida Urbana's coordinator of tenant organizing.

Yet tenants are fighting back by organizing tenant associations and forcing landlords to bargain collectively. "Tenants form unions and bargain collectively for the same reason that workers do," says City Life/Vida Urbana's website. "Ordinary people need to be organized when dealing with powerful interests." The group has organized 35 to 55 buildings with a total of about 1,500 tenants in the last four years, according to Pedulla.

In the Grove Hall neighborhood, between Roxbury and Dorchester, tenants in a 27-unit building were able to bargain their landlord down from a \$500 increase to \$30 each year for five years. Two larger buildings nearby won agreements that they would be kept affordable for 99 years. Others have been sold to the tenants or to nonprofit groups. About half, says Pedulla, are still "in struggle."

Tenant associations' tactics range from putting political and community pressure on landlords to lawsuits, inspections and direct action. In one building where the new owner tried to triple rents, he agreed to negotiate after the tenants held two sit-ins at his office and picketed his other businesses. In the past two years, tenants in 16 buildings have refused to pay rent increases — a tactic that leaves them at less risk of eviction than going on a full rent strike would, says Pedulla.

"A lot of the collective-bargaining strategies revolve around bringing market decisions into a political and moral sphere," says Steve Meacham. Real estate interests talk as if the market were as natural and beyond criticism as the weather, he continues, but "it's a human-made institution. You have to regulate it. We think justifying displacement in the name of the market is immoral."

Tenants are also trying to ally with other movements, with labor unions working for a living wage, with the anti-war movement and with the women's movement. Housing is a women's issue, McKinnon avers; the people hit the hardest by President Bush's cuts in Section 8 housing subsidies are single mothers, and most of the tenant leaders she meets are women.

"We needed that [rent-control] bill to say that tenants have a right to fight for neighborhood revitalization without fearing displacement," says Pedulla. "Now we have to go door by door, building by building, across the city, to organize tenant associations. There aren't enough tenant organizers in the city to protect everyone."



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Bush is serious about partially privatizing Social Security, and the results could be devastating for both old and young. Can he persuade Congress to go along?

Cutting the Lifeline



EDGAR MATA

By ERIC LAURSEN

Social Security is a lifeline for more than 47 million retirees, disabled workers surviving spouses and children of workers who died young. But how many of these beneficiaries feel as passionately about this 70-year-old government program as the people who are eager to dismantle it?

Dedicated free-market conservatives see the demise of Social Security as a sort of Holy Grail in their quest to return America to a Victorian-era social-economic model. In a confidential memo leaked to *Congress Daily*, White House Director of Strategic Initiatives Peter Wehner laid it on the line:

"For the first time in six decades, the Social Security battle is one we can win – and in doing so, we can help transform the political and philosophical landscape of the country. We have it within our grasp to move away from dependency on government and toward giving greater power and responsibility to individuals." This could be "one of the most significant conservative governing achievements ever," he concludes.

Ideology, plus the financial services industry's desire to get a piece of the estimated \$279 billion in fees that individual Social Security accounts could generate over the next 75 years, is driving the movement to partially privatize the program. That movement may be reaching a new high-water mark as Bush heads for his second inauguration.

Partial privatization means allowing – or maybe requiring – workers to take a portion of the payroll tax they contribute toward their Social Security benefits each time they get a paycheck, and invest it in the stock and bond markets. Along with cutting the long-term fiscal deficit Social Security is expected to accumulate as the working population ages, conservatives see partial privatization as the solution to everything from eliminating the welfare "entitlement culture" to raising anemic national savings rates to ending class conflict to freeing up the money needed for America to pursue its imperial destiny in the Middle East.

The second Bush administration is making Social Security its top-priority domestic-agenda item. That's in spite of vehement Democratic opposition and a Republican congressional leadership that's scared of being blamed for dismantling the country's most popular and successful anti-poverty program. Social Security was created during the New Deal 1930s, when the Great Depression had plunged the majority of over-65s in the United States into poverty. Since the program began regularly

indexing benefit payments to growth in wages, in the 1960s, old-age poverty has declined to just over 10 percent.

One of the prime ingredients Bush aides are talking up would be a change in the indexing formula: Instead of benefit increases being pegged to wages for social security recipients, they would be indexed to inflation.

Picking up the bill

That means those beneficiaries wouldn't participate in a potential rise in the standard of living. What'll that actually mean decades from now?

According to the Congressional Budget Office, middle-income workers born in the 1980s will take a 31 percent cut in their Social Security benefits under a plan developed by a Bush-appointed commission early in his presidency. White House aides have recently held that plan up as an example of how they'd like to restructure Social Security in the president's second term.

For those born in the 1990s, the hit would be even worse – nearly 38 percent. And that's even if Social Security's package includes the private investment accounts Bush is now stumping the country trying to sell to leery workers. Since Social Security isn't that generous a program anyway, replacing only some 30 to 40 percent of pre-retirement income on average, that's a significant reduction in a benefit workers have traditionally been able to count on.

For children of workers who die young and receive survivors' benefits – over 5 million people under 18 receive survivors' insurance under Social Security – the result would be devastating. The National Urban League concluded that an African-American male who died in his 30s would only have enough in his private account to cover less than 2 percent of the benefits that Social Security now provides his wife and children.

The \$2 trillion hole

But privatization faces some major obstacles, some practical and some political.

On average, workers with private Social Security accounts would indeed stand some chance of accumulating a higher income in retirement than they would under the present system. But "on average" is the key term here: Many if not most – and most likely the ones who can least afford it – would come

up short, especially if they're unlucky enough to reach retirement age during a downturn in the investment cycle. By contrast, the current system provides a guaranteed payout, no matter how long the retired worker lives.

Another problem is that letting workers carve out individual investment accounts would reduce the revenues used to pay current retirees. How would the resulting "transition cost" – perhaps as large as \$2 trillion – be made up? Over the past month, Bush aides have been making more and more explicit statements that Social Security "reform" will have to include benefits cuts.

But even that wouldn't put enough in Washington's coffers, long term, to float private accounts for as many as 154 million taxable workers. The solution White House aides are touting at the capital's coffee klatches and cocktail parties is to float an enormous new debt issue – perhaps \$2 trillion over 30 years. Already Republican supporters in Congress are proposing to move Social Security off the federal budget to camouflage this ploy. The markets would suck up the new debt without boosting interest rates, supporters argue, because it's merely recognizing obligations toward retirees that are already assumed unofficially.

But the White House suffered a serious embarrassment last week with the leaking of Wehner's memo, which admitted that borrowing \$2 trillion "could easily cause an economic chain-reaction: the markets go south, interest rates go up, and the economy stalls out."

Back to reality

Bush critics couldn't agree more. Peter Orszag, an economist at the Brookings Institution and co-author of a new book entitled *Saving Social Security: A Balanced Approach*, calculates that U.S. public debt would equal 100 percent of GDP – the conventional measure of the size of the economy – by 2030 under the debt-float scenario. And Alan Blinder, a former governor of the Federal Reserve System, said last month that when he mentioned to some New York bond traders that the Bushites believe the market would have no reaction to a trillion-dollar-plus debt surge, their response was "guffaws."

Another practical issue with cutting Social Security benefits – for workers, anyway – is that those benefits aren't overly generous to begin with. In fact, they're pretty modest.

"You need 70 percent of what you earned before retirement" to maintain roughly the same standard of living after you retire," notes Orszag. "Social Security replaces about 30 percent of your income, so you have another 40 percent to replace. If they scale that 30 percent back to 20 percent or even less, that's providing too thin a cushion for even middle class Americans."

There's plenty of evidence that private Social Security accounts will not make up the difference. It was recently reported that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, an ardent supporter of privatized Social Security, ran into trouble with the \$750,000 he had left over after his successful reelection campaign in 2000. He parked it in a stock index fund – the sort of investment Wall Street typically urges for workers saving long-term for their retirement. He lost \$460,000 of that money over the next two years. Many older workers who were planning to retire in those years found themselves suffering similarly – and having to put off retirement or go back to work as a result.

Other countries have tried going the private account route too, often with unhappy results. In the UK in the 1990s, workers were shocked to find that administrative charges were consuming up to 20 percent of the value of their yearly contributions to their private accounts, whereas the older government plan had cost about 1 percent. The whole privatized scheme was rocked by a "misselling" scandal in which workers were sold improper investments for their accounts.

Younger voters unconvinced

Bush faces a tough task selling his plan. Young people, who the Bush campaign team expected to be enthusiastic supporters, mostly voted for Kerry on Nov. 2, and in most surveys they placed Social Security reform far down their priority lists. So do most Americans, it turns out. In a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll this month, 50 percent of respondents said letting workers invest their payroll taxes in the stock market is "a bad idea." Only 38 percent favored it. And a majority said the election didn't give Bush a mandate to pursue such a project.

That doesn't mean he won't try it or can't succeed. For one thing, Republicans owe some debts to interest groups that are panting after the billions of dollars a year that private Social Security accounts would generate in management fees. The finance/insurance/real estate sector gave a total of \$268.8 million to candidates in the last election cycle, its second largest total ever, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Of that, 59 percent went to Republicans. Until 1996, when Social Security privatization first became a visible public issue, these industries gave to both parties in roughly equal proportions. Since then, they've favored Republicans decisively.

Washington watchers point out that unlike most incumbent presidents, Bush ran for his second term on an ideologically explicit platform, including changing Social Security. So voters had their chance to emphatically reject this idea – and didn't.

Yet congressional Republican leaders, many of whom have been burned by supporting privatization, are reluctant to do it again. In the House, 30 to 40 Republicans reportedly are eager for Bush to back off. And in the Senate, the Republicans have only 55 seats. That's a majority, but not the 60 they need to stop a Democratic filibuster under the chamber's rules.

The waverers

All eyes in Washington, then, are on a gaggle of centrist Dems who have indicated they are willing to discuss some action on Social Security. Key names are Connecticut's Joe Lieberman, Indiana's Evan Bayh, Arkansas's Blanche Lincoln, and Nebraska's Ben Nelson, all of whom like making deals when Democrats and Republicans are especially divided. Along with four other Democratic senators, Lincoln and Bayh are "advisors" to a new "Senate-focused progressive advocacy group" called Third Way.

Reportedly both Third Way and the conservative Democratic Leadership Council, angered by the Republicans' relentless partisanship and disturbed by the burgeoning budget deficits, are planning to come out against Bush's private accounts idea. Still, the lust to cut a deal is strong enough to make a lot of Social Security defenders uneasy. Lincoln, Nelson, Lieberman, and Montana's Max Baucus reportedly met with two Republican colleagues and agreed to meet again on Social Security later this month. Baucus, however, then disappointed his prospective partners by telling the *New York Times* he would not be "the linchpin" the president is looking for.

"It's a tempting thing if [lawmakers] don't see any downside, because they'll start getting campaign contributions from people they couldn't talk to before," says Roger Hickey, co-director of the Campaign for America's Future (CAF), which for years has been instrumental in efforts to stop privatization.

Showdown

So Social Security's traditional defenders are rallying their forces to oppose any slippage. Hickey says the CAF quadrupled its roster of activists during the presidential race and is working hard to shore up the congressional Dems. "We're on our way to flooding their offices with emails and faxes saying don't do it," he says.

AARP, the 35-million-member seniors organization, chastened by the criticism it took for backing Bush's Medicare drug plan in 2003, is spending \$5 million on a raft of TV commercials and other propaganda against privatization. The AFL-CIO, among other things, sent a letter last month to 46 financial services companies – which do big business with union pension funds – asking them to swear off support for privatization. Meanwhile, the Club for Growth, a conservative Washington lobbying outfit, is reportedly asking its backers to fund a \$15 million campaign to persuade the public that private accounts are a good thing.

In reality, however, it could only be a matter of weeks before we know whether Social Security is truly on the block in 2005. Bush must still work with his party's lawmakers to develop a bill they're both comfortable with, and that they can sell to at least five Senate Dems. They don't have much time to do it. Keeping Social Security intact will depend on whether congressional Democrats maintain a united front – just as it has for the past 10 years.

Eric Laursen, a New York-based journalist and activist, is writing a book, The People's Pension: The Politics of Social Security Since 1980.

billionaires for "corporatization"

Is there room for street-level theater in the fight against Social Security privatization? Billionaires for Bush are going to try it on Jan. 20 – Bush Reinauguration Day – when they "auction off" Social Security. Time: 10 a.m. Place: the Franklin D. Roosevelt Monument, Ohio Drive SW between the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials, Washington, D.C.

Privatization has been a live conservative cause for 10 years. But activists fighting to preserve the traditional program have concentrated on lobbying Congress: writing research reports, books, and op-eds; and confronting privatizers at public forums and on the campaign trail. The Billionaires think some brazen satire is really needed.

"We're reframers," says "Ivan Tital," chapter leader of the DC Billionaires. "Democrats lose debates because the Republicans spend a lot of time getting their message right and getting it out first. We're going to counter that." For instance, the term "privatize" tests too well in surveys, so the Billionaires talk instead about "corporatizing" the program in their mock campaign – "champagne," actually – for the Bush plan, which kicks off with the Jan. 20 "auction."

At the Billionaires' national convergence in Washington the two days after the inaugural, one order of business will be to plan a long-term national mobilization around Social Security. Possibilities include more street action, aiming messages at Democratic "wobblers" in Congress who the Republicans might pressure to support the President, and even producing ads, direct mail, or a phone bank "champagne" in favor of corporatized Social Security. "We want to make headlines, forcing the story to be about the other side's weaknesses," says "Ivan Tital."

To get the word out, he says the Billionaires are hoping to partner with a union or nonprofit that's already working against the Republican agenda. —E.L.



Billionaires for Bush will be the toast of the town during the inauguration, Jan. 20. PHOTO: FREDASKEW.COM

More Social Security, Not Less

Even after 30-plus years of indexing Social Security to wages, American retirees are still more likely to live in poverty than those in any other large industrialized country. Spouses and children of workers who die young, and retirees who spent their career at near-minimum-wage jobs need help too. Here are some ideas for improving the program and bolstering its finances:

> GIVE 'EM A RAISE

Boost Social Security's monthly benefit payments 5 percent, including for the disabled. That would help offset the Bush administration's decision to raise monthly Medicare premiums 17.4 percent this year.

> MORE FOR SURVIVORS

Benefits for surviving spouses now range from 50 to 67 percent of the combined husband and wife's benefit – one reason elderly women are twice as likely as men to be poor. Boosting their payment to 75 percent would increase annual benefits for over 3 million widows and widowers by an average \$1,000 apiece.

> MORE FOR LOW-INCOME WORKERS

Creating a minimum 75 percent-of-income replacement rate would be a big boost for the 7 million retired Americans who worked at near-minimum-wage jobs throughout their careers. Or, create a minimum benefit for all retirees who get 75 percent or more of their income from Social Security.

> HELP LOWER-INCOME AMERICANS TO SAVE

Former Clinton economic advisor Gene Sperling suggests creating a "universal 401(k)" savings plan: The government would match contributions by moderate to low-income workers. This could be funded by partially reversing Bush's phase-out of the estate tax.

> REPEAL THE BUSH TAX CUTS

Concerned that Social Security will go broke as the working population ages? Sperling points out that over time, the nearly \$100 billion a year that Bush lopped off the tax bills of the richest 1 percent of Americans could keep Social Security solvent for the next 75 years.

> REMOVE THE CAP

The amount subject to payroll tax – the tax that pays for Social Security – will be capped at \$90,000 of income for 2005. Removing the cap would cover most of the program's 75-year projected shortfall.

> ... OR, DO NOTHING

Even the Social Security trustees say the program's fiscal "deficit" will amount to just 0.7 percent of gross domestic product over the next 75 years. So why do anything drastic now? —E.L.

Who's opposing privatization

Here's a partial list of some of the organizations engaged in the Social Security battle, plus progressive research groups that are putting out useful information on privatization:

> Campaign for America's Future

(<http://www.ourfuture.org/>)

> AARP

(<http://www.aarp.org/>)

> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities

(<http://www.cbpp.org/>)

> Economic Policy Institute

(<http://www.epinet.org/>)

> Gray Panthers

(<http://www.graypanthers.org/>)

> Institute for Women's Policy Research

(<http://www.iwpr.org/>)

> National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare

(<http://www.ncpssm.org/>)

> The Century Foundation

(<http://www.tcf.org/>)

> United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries

(<http://www.ucc.org/justice/witness/index.html>)



Salvation & Shopping In Marion

BY BENNETT BAUMER

MARION, Indiana—A Sunday evening downpour didn't vanquish spirits at Sunnycrest Baptist Church in Marion, as a new pastor arrived in town to deliver the New Year's sermon, "Success Is a Choice." In a church filled with hundreds of worshippers, multiple screens for the PowerPoint version of the sermon, and a two-story camera crane to broadcast the service on local cable TV, the pastor exhorted his flock to turn to Jesus for success.

By this measure, success is to be found in almost every neighborhood and on almost every street corner in Marion. Multiple signs advertise "fellowship" and ministries of every evangelical shade.

But Marion, a working-class town of 25,000 a hour northeast of Indianapolis, is demolishing abandoned homes at a record clip as the population declines and homeowners default on mortgages. The city is also struggling to lease out empty factories while confronting tight budgets for schools and other basic services.

Once driven by mom-and-pop shops and union factory jobs, Marion's future seems to be big Christianity and big retail.

The town square stands half empty or half full, depending on whom you ask, while the highway on the outskirts of town is lined with chain stores, including the king of low prices and low wages, Wal-Mart.

"I think the future is pretty good. There's a collection agency moving into the square," says Keith Alabach, executive director of Crisis Pregnancy Center, located on the square. "A major source of our funding is through the church."

After pitting other Indiana counties against one another, Wal-Mart is expected to announce soon that it will open a large distribution center near Marion that will employ hundreds. Marion and local leaders are also optimistic about the rapidly growing Indiana Wesleyan University, which was ranked along with Jerry Falwell's Liberty University as one of the nation's top conservative colleges. Local leaders expect the college to hire more people in the years to come.

"I don't think we will ever see the manufacturing base we once had. I think you'll see more service-sector and distribution-warehouse jobs," says Grant County Republican Chairman David Murrell. "We have two Christian universities – Taylor and Indiana Wesleyan. They've [Wesleyan] gotten really big, really quick."

As big Christianity moves up, big manufacturing moves out of Grant County, in which Marion is located. Last spring, hundreds of union workers at the Thomson/RCA electronics plant showed up for work only to be told it would be their last day: the factory was closing immediately.

Today, the only workers left in the facility are security and contractors taking apart the machinery to be shipped to other factories throughout the world.

The effects of neo-liberal trade agreements, the globalization of capital and a race to the bottom on labor costs have caused a long list of Marion's factories to shut down. One of the remaining unionized factories is the Atlas cast-iron foundry, started in 1893 by the Gartland family, which still owns and operates it. Atlas survives by picking up work that closed American foundries leave behind and by finding specialized market niches.

"We don't compete with China," says foundry owner James Gartland. Atlas employs around 100 people and has lost much of its work to China, lured there by cheap labor and lax environmental enforcement. "To move things would cost a lot and the capital is here, so we stay," he says. "We also have a good workforce."

Gartland's brand of small-scale, local capitalism is dying. His brand of capitalism clashes with the Republican far-right, which espouses pro-big-business free-market policies. These same policies have bled manufacturing orders and millions of jobs from America towns and cities.

Inside the foundry, union workers arrive before sunrise to pour molten iron from a large furnace into vats transported on rails hanging from the ceilings. The iron is poured into molding machines that produce pumps, valves and special-order stadium seat components. The glow of molten metal illuminates soot-covered faces. The roar of the machines is overwhelming.

"It's a shame the economy is so bad, and the chance of organizing these new jobs like Wal-Mart is slim to none," says Atlas foundry worker Terry Beaty and vice-president of Steelworkers Local 466. Beaty is sitting in the union office, soot ringing his eyes and industrial-strength safety glasses resting on top of his head.

So how did Marion and deindustrialization? They voted for "values." Bush garnered 69 percent of the tally here, and voters put the city, county and state governments firmly in the hands of the GOP – the party of big business and tax cuts for the rich.

"I don't understand these Christian issues," says Local 466 president Gene Grant, another foundry worker. "To me, the issue is how do you make a living?"

Across the street from the foundry rests Don's Tap. The tavern is eclectically adorned with a guitar signed by Nascar driver Dale Earnhardt Jr., regalia from former Indiana University basketball coach Bobby Knight, and a framed, well-lit portrait of John F. Kennedy. A bumper sticker on the fridge warns, "Friends don't let friends vote Republican."

At the bar, Jane Tucker talked about being laid off from her job in the retail sector and about her brother, an army recruiter in Kentucky. She expects that he will go to the Middle East when his recruiting position ends.

"I'm proud of him, it is his career and I support him, though it seems senseless that we are even there. What are we fighting for?" says Tucker.

Someone left a copy of Marion's newspaper on a table in the bar. Inside it, a story detailed how a soldier's trip back to the area for the holidays was cut short because he got called to go to Iraq. The family of the soldier was collecting money to visit him in California before he shipped out.



NO LOVE LOST: protesters overwhelm Bush's 2000 inauguration.

DOWN WITH THE KING!

An Interview With D.C. Organizer Jim Macdonald About the January 20 Presidential Inauguration

BY MIKE SCHUWERK

Tens of thousands of people are expected to converge on President's Bush's second inauguration in D.C. on Jan. 20. Hundreds of organizations will bring a wide range of tactics and philosophies to the protest, including counter-inaugural actions, homeless outreach, and a "die-in." *The Independent* spoke to Jim Macdonald, an activist with the D.C. Anti-War Network (DAWN), a group of organizations and individuals working locally to end U.S. military intervention abroad and attacks on civil liberties at home.

What message does DAWN seek to communicate to people inside the U.S. with the inaugural actions?

Jim Macdonald: DAWN would like to communicate that if we build things from the grassroots with an open, non-hierarchical, democratic process – that really is our only hope for the changes we want to see.

Some activists and members of the left seem disillusioned or pessimistic when it comes to protest nowadays, especially after the election. Do you think protest changes under a second Bush administration?

Our particular action in some ways represents shifting tactics. We were never all that interested in the election. For groups that were interested in the election I think that they need to concentrate less on electioneering and more on producing social change.

We want to show people that we have to do some much more fundamental changes than the sort of quick-fix solutions that so many were hoping for.

And what does that mean?

We have got to get involved with topics in our community that matter. As an anti-war group we tend to be abstract, not always in touch with our community. For instance, our group has endorsed an action on the day before the convention where we will be trying to feed homeless people and ultimately try to realize that what is happening with the war does have a real effect for people in our community.

Another difficulty protesters have faced is an increase in aggressive police tactics. How do we keep protest effective when faced with these types of tactics?

In New York they arrested almost 1100 people. Frankly, they could not handle it. People were stuck in that jail as much because of the NYPD's own incompetence as it was to keep people off the street. If we had any sense of strategy, knowing that they really couldn't handle a mass civil resistance of any kind, then we wouldn't be demoralized by the fact that they swept us all off the streets that day.

What if 50,000 of those 500,000 on August 29th had laid down in the streets of New York and refused to get up? That's only 10 percent of that crowd. Once they start using much more violent tactics to disperse a crowd like that I don't see how they could hold up in any kind of court of public opinion.

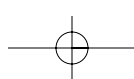
Do you see the anti-war movement getting to the point where it is possible to organize civil disobedience on that scale?

I don't know if we will be ready in the next year. We don't look at this as a short-term movement that has to have a result right now. Because we are going to have a lot of things that will look on the face of it like failures but I think they'll be the ultimate success of our movement to radically change the way society is run and will function.

J20

CORONATION
PROTEST INFORMATION

dc.indymedia.org | counter-inaugural.org
dawndc.net | turnyourbackonbush.org
globalizethis.org | codepinkalert.org
billionairesforbush.com



on the street



PHOTO: CAITLIN BENEDETTO

COMMUNITY CALENDAR JANUARY

THE INDYPENDENT

has open meetings every Tuesday at 7p.m. at 34 E. 29th St., 2nd floor.

FRI JAN 14

6 - 9p.m. • \$3-5 donation at the door
Free with snacks for the potluck
Zines available for \$2
RADICAL TEACHERS ZINE RELEASE CELEBRATION will bring kid rock bands, orchestras, potluck food, martial arts, and a bunch of other performances by friends and allies.
Brooklyn Free School 120 16th St. btw 4th/5th Ave.

SAT JAN 15

8 p.m. • donation requested
BENEFIT FOR SRI LANKAN RELIEF
Support progressive relief efforts after the tsunami. Performers will include Mango Tribe's Varuni Tiruchelvam and Marian Yalini Thambynayagam.
EMBORA Movement and Wellness Studio, 900 Fulton St., Brooklyn

1 p.m. - 5 p.m. • Free
COUNTER-RECRUITMENT BOOTCAMP
Get the lowdown on military recruitment & enlistment, including the targeting youth of color and how you can resist. Help us build a crew of youth (and others) who can speak knowledgeably with their peers, lead workshops in their schools & organizations, and provide facts and alternatives wherever recruiters show up. A crash course to get ready for the citywide counter recruitment. Strategy Session on Sunday.
LGBT Community Center, 208 W13th St. 212-239-0022

SUN JAN 16

10 a.m. - 6 p.m. • Free
COUNTER RECRUITMENT STRATEGY SESSION
Meet with people from all over the city who are doing (or are interested in doing) counter-military-recruitment work. Sponsored by: Ya-Ya (Youth Activists-Youth Allies) Network, United For Peace and Justice-NYC, and the War Resisters League.

MON JAN 17

7 p.m. • \$5-\$10 sliding, no one turned away
IMC MOVIE NIGHT: NOT MY PRESIDENT
Get ready for the GWB inauguration with a double screening of 2000 counter-inaugural flicks including IMC-Video's "Not My President."
NYC Independent Media Center, 34 E. 29th St, 2nd fl. 212-684-8112

7 p.m. • Free
ROUNDTABLE: ROY AND KING
A tribute to the legacy of Martin Luther King will be highlighted in the Freedom Hall weekly roundtable discussion on Arundhati Roy's *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*. Co-sponsored by Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party.
Freedom Hall, 113 W. 128th Street in Harlem (between Malcolm X and 7th Ave.) 212-222-0633

11 a.m. - 2 p.m. • Free
KING AND THE HIP-HOP GENERATION
A youth forum, "Today's Hip-Hop Generation: Living the Dream or Creating a Nightmare?" will compare Dr. King's aspirations for African Americans to the values dramatized in today's hip-hop music videos. There will be refreshments and prizes.
Alfred W. Lerner Hall, Roone Arledge Cinema, Columbia University, 114th & Broadway

TUE JAN 18

7:30 p.m. • Free
THE POWER OF NIGHTMARES
Union County Alliance for Peace, Justice, and the Environment will screen the first episode of the BBC program "The Power of Nightmares" at their first monthly meeting of 2005.
First United Methodist Church, 1 East Broad St., Westfield, NJ

7:30 p.m. • Free
IMC VIDEO TEAM MEETING
The NYC IMC's video team meets at 7:30 every Tuesday night. New members are welcome.
NYC Independent Media Center, 34 E. 29th St, 2nd fl. 212-684-8112

WED JAN 19

6:30 - 8 p.m. • Free
FINANCING GREEN BUILDINGS
How can we make green buildings possible? The Enterprise Foundation's Green Communities Initiative will be the focus of the forum with additional speakers from participating financial institutions.
Hafele Showroom-Madison Park, 25 E. 26th St.

THU JAN 20

6:30 - 8 p.m. • Free
HOW TO WORK THE GOVERNMENT
Want to be politically active but feel confused about who's in charge of what? Would you like to learn more about the government's influence on LGBT issues at local, state and federal levels? Join us for an activist training workshop that will leave politicians shaking in their boots!
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, 208 West 13th St. 212-620-7310

7 p.m. • Free/Donation
HOMELESS & HOUSING ACTION WORKSHOP
Where does the housing crisis come from? How can it be stopped? Picture the Homeless, a grassroots group of homeless people organizing for social justice and housing for all, has put together a workshop analyzing the root causes

of homelessness and NYC's wretched housing market, and what can be done about it.
Bluestockings Bookstore, Cafe and Activist Resource Center 172 Allen St. Btw. Stanton and Rivington www.bluestockings.org

FRI JAN 21

6 p.m. • \$5 suggested donation
HAITIAN FILMS
In collaboration with its current exhibition, "In Praise of Our People: Haitian Collectors of Haitian Art," the Caribbean Cultural Center presents a night of Haitian films, including "Mickey Mouse Goes to Haiti" and "Semet Ko" (a film on AIDS). Discussion, moderated by Dorothy Desir and Steve Coupeau, will follow. Co-sponsored by the New York Institute for Haitian Advocacy, Caribbean Cultural Center, 408 W 58th St. 212-876-1936

9 p.m. • Free
HOLLEY ANDERSON-ACOUSTIC AMERICANA
Vox Pop Cafe, 1022 Cortelyou Rd., Brooklyn 718-940-2048

8:00 - 10:30 p.m. • Free
LIVES OF MIDDLE EASTERN YOUTH
A mini film series will explore the varied experiences and lives of Middle Eastern youth. All screenings start at 8 p.m.
Millennium, 66 E. 4th St.

7pm • Free / Donation
WORKSHOP ON HOMELESS & HOUSING ACTION WITH PICTURE THE HOMELESS
Bluestockings Bookstore, Cafe and Activist Resource Center 172 Allen St. Btw. Stanton and Rivington www.bluestockings.org

SAT JAN 22

11 a.m. - 6 p.m. • \$10-12 registration fee
AND SO FORTH CONFERENCE
Artists and activists will share skills and strategies and reflect on past advocacy successes (and failures), taking into account what has been effective in sparking enthusiasm, raising funds and bringing to light crucial issues in order to look toward developing new approaches to difficult challenges.
57 Thames Street in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn (Morgan stop on the L train)

7 p.m. • Free

ART AND RESISTANCE
An evening with performer Revered Billy and author Steve Duncombe.
Vox Pop Cafe, 1022 Cortelyou Rd. 718-940-2048

SUN JAN 23

2 - 6 p.m. • Free
LIVING MUSEUM WITH BROTHERHOOD / SISTER SOL
The Living Museum is an interactive exhibition highlighting the mission & activities of The Brotherhood / Sister Sol through written, visual and oral expressions of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol family. Meet the staff, board and supporters. Refreshments will be served. RSVP requested.
The Brotherhood / Sister Sol, 512 West 143 St. RSVP vj@brotherhood-sistersol.org

7pm • free
CALIBAN AND THE WITCH
This book party will celebrate Sylvia Federici's history of the body in the transition to capitalism.
Bluestockings Bookstore, Cafe and Activist Resource Center 172 Allen St. Btw. Stanton and Rivington www.bluestockings.org

MON JAN 24

8 p.m. • \$25
SIMON SHAHEEN & MADE IN PALESTINE
Simon Shaheen, internationally renowned virtuoso on oud and violin, will dazzle listeners with his soaring technique and unparalleled grace in a benefit performance for the "Made in Palestine" art exhibition. Slides of the exhibition will also be shown at this event.
Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400

7pm • Free
Bluestockings Revolutionary Potluck Discussion: The Politics of Natural Disasters
All invited to present and participate. See website for description and guidelines.
Bluestockings Bookstore, Cafe and Activist Resource Center 172 Allen St. Btw. Stanton and Rivington www.bluestockings.org

WED JAN 26

2:30 p.m. • Free
THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY CUBA
Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Cespedes Vicar General of Havana will give a lecture on the church and religion in Cuba today.
McGinley Center-Fordham University (Rose Hill), Bronx, NY

THU JAN 27

7 p.m. • Free
IMC PHOTO TEAM MEETING
The New York City Indymedia Center photo team meets at 7 p.m. every Thursday night.
34 E. 29th St., 2nd floor

FRI JAN 28

7 p.m. - 2 p.m. • \$20
PEOPLE'S MUSIC NETWORK CONCERT
The People's Music Network for Songs of Freedom & Struggle will begin its annual winter gathering with songs of freedom and struggle. Performers include Pete Seeger, the Brooklyn Women's Chorus, the Disabled In Action Singers, the Lafayette Inspirational Ensemble, Harmonic Insurgence, the Brooklyn High School for the Arts Chorus, and the PMN Chorus.
Brooklyn High School for the Arts, 345 Dean Street, Brooklyn 718-230-4999 Saturday, January 29

7 p.m. • Free
CRITICAL MASS
Come ride or support NYC's biggest bike event. Meet at the North side of Union Square.
www.times-up.org

SAT JAN 29

10 a.m. - 6 p.m. • Free
FREE STUFF FAIR
Freecycle New York city's will hold a post-holiday re-gifting extravaganza. Bring gently used clothing, working electronics and appliances, and other small items, and take home whatever you like.
6th St. Community Center, East Village

SAT FEB 5

1-4 p.m.
GENDER DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS WORKSHOP
Teachers College, Columbia University 525 West 120th St.

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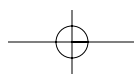
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U.S. Seeks to Oust Chief of U.N. Nuclear Agency

By RHIANNA TYSON

Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), is often hailed as the archetypal diplomat – fluent in several languages, equally at ease in any cosmopolitan city from New York (where he obtained his doctorate at New York University) to Cairo, and decades of experience in the field of international law and diplomacy.

Unfortunately for ElBaradei, the Bush administration is seeking to oust him from his post due to the even-handed role he played during the search for nuclear weapons infrastructure in Iraq and his role in preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

In both cases, ElBaradei stood firmly for relying on the evidence supplied by weapons inspectors.

Under ElBaradei, the work of the IAEA has made headlines in newspapers around the world. The agency, which carries the double mandate of promoting nuclear energy while ensuring that nuclear materials intended for civilian use are not diverted to weapons purposes, was tasked with carrying out the intrusive inspections into Iraq's alleged nuclear weapons program. Several times he reported to the United Nations Security Council that no evidence of a reconstituted nuclear weapons program in Iraq had been found. Yet several more months' worth of inspections would have given his teams the time necessary to resolve the few remaining outstanding questions they had.

The Bush administration, seething to go to war over Iraq's alleged weapons programs, denied the IAEA request for more time.

Since then, ElBaradei has once again favored factual, even-handed negotiations over belligerent calls to war as he sought to resolve questions about Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program. Despite relatively successful negotiations between the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Iran, often facilitated by the IAEA, the Bush administration has remained unrelenting in its push to oust and punish Iran as a bonafide nuclear proliferator.

ElBaradei's stubborn reliance on evidence and facts has obstructed the Bush administration's possible drive for another war.

The U.S. has also been miffed by ElBaradei's uncompromising stance in regard to nuclear disarmament. "We must abandon the unworkable notion that it is morally reprehensible for some countries to pursue weapons of mass destruction yet morally acceptable for others to rely on them for security – and indeed to continue to refine their capacities and postulate plans for their use," he wrote in a *New York Times* op-ed article last February.

This statement was a direct hit at the United States, which maintains an arsenal of more than 10,000 nuclear weapons while demonstrating a willingness to go to war with any country which seeks the same source of "security."

Recently, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* reported that the United States tapped ElBaradei's telephone in order to intercept conversations he had with Iranian diplomats. The intercepts produced no evidence of nefarious conduct by ElBaradei.

The United States has called for a two-term limit for U.N. officials, although former IAEA director-general Hans Blix served four terms and Sigvard Eklund served five terms before him.

If reconfirmed in his post, ElBaradei would embark on his third term. The votes of 12 members of the 35-member Board of Governors would be required to block ElBaradei's reconfirmation. The vote will take place in early March.

Abbas Assumes Tin Crown

By ALI ABUNIMAH

Once again, the media and the international peace process industry have declared that it is an "historic day" for the Palestinian people. The occasion this time is the election of Mahmoud Abbas as head of the Palestinian Authority in the occupied territories. Yet most of these Palestinian people, for whom this day has been declared historic, do not live in the occupied territories; the majority of Palestinians live in diaspora or as refugees outside their homeland, a direct result of the ethnic cleansing which created Israel in 1947-48, and of the occupation of the remainder of Palestine in 1967.

For Palestinians in the diaspora, such historic days feel like everyone is having a party that is supposed to be in your honor, except that no one invited you, or perhaps it is like watching a television movie of your life that bears little resemblance to reality. The feeling I have now is exactly what I felt on that other big historic day, Sept. 13, 1993, when the Oslo Accords were signed in Washington by a beaming Yasir Arafat and the recalcitrant Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, under the beatific gaze of President Bill Clinton. I feel a mixture of exasperation, hopelessness and determination.

For days now, I have done hours of talk radio about the elections, trying to explain as best as I can why replacing Yasser Arafat with Mahmoud Abbas will not lead to peace, why Palestinians aren't ecstatic, how the Israeli occupation makes democracy impossible. But for the most part, the script has been written and Palestinians are only called upon to read their lines. So the TV and newspapers are full of happy Palestinian voters who debate only whether Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) or Mustafa Barghouti is right for them. Herds of international observers are on hand to certify that a few irregularities notwithstanding, this was a model election of which Palestinians can be proud.



A PALESTINIAN WOMAN VOTES, while another observes, at a polling station in Ramallah.

Senator John Sununu, who was part of the U.S. observer delegation read from the official script: "It's a democratic election in the Arab world, and that in itself is somewhat historic," the *New York Times* quoted him as saying. Sununu added that the Palestinian leadership will now have "a new level of credibility to talk to the Israelis and impose reform and reorganization of the security forces, so there's a reason to be optimistic."

In the ghost-written screenplay that the Palestinians are being forced to act out, the election is "good news." This means that any information that interferes with this agreed narrative – that we are at the cusp of a new era of peace, democracy and reform – has to be carefully filtered out.

In order to maintain this fiction, other crucial facts must be routinely screened from public view. While the peace process scriptwriters insist that Mahmoud Abbas can

bring peace where Arafat failed, the Israelis at least know better.

So in the long-running Palestine soap opera, Abbas, the understudy who has been hired to replace the deceased lead actor Arafat, is being offered the choice of two roles by the Israeli-American scriptwriters. He can play the obedient native administrator of a defeated people who gets to wear a suit and call himself president of a fictional state, or he can don Arafat's kaffiyeh and assume the role of the Palestinians' unreformed "terrorist" leader.

As with in all soap operas, repetitiveness and increasingly absurd plot twists eventually wear out even the most faithful audience. And when this episode is over, the Palestinian people will still be there, steadfastly, patiently, determined to regain their usurped rights and see justice done, come what may.

For the full report: electronicintifada.org

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The Black Book of U.S. Imperialism

Todd Gitlin, Paul Berman and assorted intellectuals of the “decent left” have earned their keep arguing that anti-imperialism is nothing but an echo chamber of nihilism, oedipal rage and tacit support for whom-ever the governing class declares the enemy. Once upon a time their kind derided the Communist left as window-dressing for the gulag; now they argue that anti-imperialists are shills for “Islamofascist” death cults and suicide bombers. As the gate-keepers of “acceptable” dissent, they rarely take time to note what it is, this America, they’ve declared their loyalty to and what it is the “anti-Americans” oppose.

Although his book isn’t dedicated to them, Ward Churchill’s *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens* is a necessary intervention into not just the debates on the “new imperialism,” but the plot and themes of the United States of America on the stage of world history. Extensive and carefully documented, Churchill’s chronology catalogues America’s genocides, conquests and tragedies from the Indian Wars up through the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. He wasn’t surprised September 11 happened, just that it took so long.

Churchill’s impatience with the official delusions of eternal innocence, inherently “good intentions” and U.S. exceptionalism goes beyond scapegoating the current cabal running the show. He approaches his atrocity list of American misdeeds from Malcolm X’s basic premise: “We didn’t land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth rock landed on us.”

What emerges, Churchill writes “is the portrait of a country which has not experienced a time when it was actually ‘at peace’ since its inception. Each and every year for the past 226 years, the U.S. military has been in action somewhere, and quite often in a

ON THE JUSTICE OF ROOSTING CHICKENS

By Ward Churchill
AK Press, 2003

POX AMERICANA: EXPOSING THE AMERICAN EMPIRE

Eds. John Belamy Foster
& Robert McChesney
Monthly Review, 2004

lot of places simultaneously... Far from ‘fighting for freedom and democracy’ the U.S. has with equal consistency fought to repeal it anywhere and everywhere, not excluding the domestic sphere of the U.S. itself. The American public may be conveniently oblivious to these realities, but the rest of the world is not.”

WHICH “WE”?

Did we have the attacks of September 11 coming? Well, it depends on who “we” are.

In the shadow of the towers on Sept. 10, all the inequalities and waste of the U.S. empire were on triumphant display.

Entitled and oblivious, arrogant and thrilled that they owned the world, the ruling classes and their courtiers walked the streets at ease, drinking their Colombian coffee, sweetened with Haitian sugar, flavored with African cocoa, from cups made in China – all prepared by Mexican migrants in the back of the house. The neighborhood brothels were busy because times were good for the men with \$200 for a lunchtime fuck from some recent Russian immigrant trying to buy her freedom in this, the best of all possible worlds.

Looked at from this angle, September 11 was the loudest alarm clock that ever went off. The battle between “us” and “them” isn’t the one advertised on TV.

“Americans will either become active parts of the solution to what they and their country have



wrought, or they will remain equally active parts of the problem. There is no third option,” writes Churchill.

As with his prior books, particularly *Pacifism As Pathology*, Churchill reserves a special spite for the self-styled progressives who acknowledge some, or even all of imperialism’s horrors in order to demonstrate the ultimate justice of the system. Undercutting his critique is the strange satisfaction he finds in the idea of “two, three, many 911s” should we not rise to his standard of effective dissent.

That might make sense if millions of Americans weren’t horrified with the path the country is on or that the most obvious beneficiary of terrorism wasn’t consistently the most reactionary elements. Some people got their karmic backlash on September 11. Some were collateral damage.

None of that matters to Churchill because he writes off not just “America,” but the “unending ranks of average Iowa farm boys who have so willingly pulled the triggers, launched the missiles and dropped the cluster bombs.”

For all his righteous anger, the tragic flaw throughout his entire history as provocateur-author is to discount the possibility that

everyday people can rise above the mendacity of our rulers.

If Iowa’s farmboys are beyond hope, even Churchill’s most damning evidence is little more than justification for the cynical paralysis of passive support for terrorism. Flipping America the bird might be satisfying, but it fails to engage the matrix of conflict within America or see any positive path those taking responsibility for the crimes of empire can engage. As Arundhati Roy recently put it, “Anti-americanism is the anti-imperialism of fools.”

In a sense, the Gitlins and Churchills of the world deserve each other. They agree that the only options for allegiance are between the same “us” and “them” that Bush serves up.

Rising from the charnel house of the first World War, the most successful anti-war movement in history not only pulled Russia out of the war, but brought down the Tsar that turned farmboys from Ukraine into killers. If they could do that back then, then I’m not willing to give up on Iowa (or Brooklyn) just yet.

In that same spirit, *Monthly Review’s* anthology *Pox Americana* delivers a three-pronged analysis of the current situation: informative histories of U.S. imperialism, what has and hasn’t changed with the rise of the neo-conservatives, and a half-dozen well-grounded essays on the possibility and challenges of building a popular anti-imperialist movement inside the United States from some of the people who are trying to do so.

The depth and diversity of the contributors, including Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Immanuel Wallerstein, Barbara Epstein and Bill Fletcher, remind us that we’re not starting from zero. U.S. history isn’t just a slaughter bench, but a constant struggle. With eyes to the future, *Pox Americana* is ammunition for the coming war.

—JED BRANDT



Liberals Still Don’t Get It

Despite differences between Bush and Kerry, not a single major issue was truly up for grabs in last year’s election. From the environment to the distribution of wealth to gay marriage to the war in Iraq and foreign policy more generally, the differences between the two candidates were of degree, not kind. One would continue the attack on the New Deal and sane public policy while the other would, maybe, roll back some of the last four years of erosion.

Nonetheless, the presidential election of 2004

sparked more interest and resulted in more anguish than any for many years. *What We Do Now*, a collection of 22 essays written and published on the fly, emerges from this grief. Kerry supporters from Howard Dean and Martha Nussbaum to Greg Palast have contributed to a volume intended to give the faithful “a sense that there is something they can do right now.”

That the authors are well intentioned cannot be denied. But that doesn’t always result in usefulness. While interesting and occasionally insightful, *What We Do Now* is inadequate. If the problem the left is faced with is merely how to get John Kerry or someone like him into office in four years, a better volume than this one could not be desired but it is not.

With significant exceptions, the recent history of the U.S. left is one of submission and defeat. It was Clinton, a supposed liberal, who passed the legislation that makes up most of the Patriot Act, who with the U.K. bombed Iraq and whose gutting of welfare was the precursor to Bush’s agenda of Social Security privatization. And it was that confirmed reactionary Nixon who, under pressure from an insurgent left, created the Environmental Protection Agency and tried to institute a guaranteed minimum income. The problem is not the last four years but the last three decades.

The left has been out-organized by the extreme right. It will take more than registering voters in swing states or contributing to MoveOn to change this. Unfortunately, none of *What We Do Now’s* writers acknowledge this larger context. Even ignoring Nicholas Kristof, who suggests that the Democrats should ape New Labor and compromise on principles – does he think Kerry is Paul Wellstone? – few essays advocate anything more drastic than a “revitalization” of the Democratic Party.

Even the book’s token radicals Leslie Cagan and Medea Benjamin suggest little more than continuing to hold mass demonstrations and press local anti-war resolutions. Feb. 15, 2003 was the largest protest in world history, but did it change anything?

“Power concedes nothing without demand,” said Fredrick Douglass. It’s time to start demanding.

—MATT WASSERMAN



The Oracle Vs. The Architects

A black woman wrote the Matrix. Say word. In one of the largest settlements in Hollywood’s history, Sophia Stewart is receiving damages from all three Matrix films, as well as *The Terminator* and its sequels. While the settlement is undisclosed, the gross of the films was over \$2.5 billion. Her charges against producer Joel Silver and “writer-directors” the Wachowski brothers included copyright infringement and racketeering. She had submitted her manuscript, “The Third Eye”, in response to an ad placed by the Wachowski Brothers in the mid-eighties.

An FBI investigation found that more than thirty minutes had

been chopped from *The Matrix* in an attempt to avoid a lawsuit. “Credible witnesses employed at Warner Brothers came forward, claiming that the executive and lawyers had full knowledge that the work in question did not belong to the Wachowski brothers.” According to Stewart, the six-year old lawsuit has been subject to a media blackout “because Warner Brothers parent company is AOL-Time Warner...this giant owns 95 percent of the media.”

Says Stewart, “My whole message to the world is about God and good and about choice, about spirituality prevailing over technocracy.” —M.W.

Tsunami Deaths Hit an Already Suffering Aceh

Aceh, Indonesia's westernmost province, was the area most devastated by the Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami. However, Aceh's agony predates the tsunami. The resource-rich province supplies much of the natural gas for South Korea and Japan, but the revenues go straight to ExxonMobil and the Indonesian government. In recent years, the Indonesian military has violently suppressed Aceh's grassroots independence movement.

Investigative journalist Allan Nairn visited Acehese refugee camps before the tsunami. Nairn, who has reported for over two decades on U.S.-sponsored state terrorism in Central America, Haiti and East Timor, recently spoke about Aceh with Derrick O'Keefe of *Seven Oaks Magazine*.



A number of activist groups in the United States have concerns that the Indonesian government will hamper disaster relief efforts, and also that they will exploit the situation to further repress Acehese political activists.

Well, the Indonesian military is continuing to attack villages, more than a dozen villages in East Aceh and North Aceh away from the coast, even though General Susilo, the president of Indonesia, announced that they would be lifting the state of siege. The military is also impeding the flow of aid. They've commandeered a hanger at the Banda Aceh airport, where they are taking control of internationally shipped-in supplies.

What is the background to the political conflict in Aceh?

Really the second wave of devastation to hit Aceh was the Indonesian military. Aceh is one of the most repressive places in the world. They have been under de facto martial law for years. Now, international relief workers and foreign journalists are pouring in,

but, until the tsunami, they were banned by the Indonesian military. The reason is that the Acehese want a free vote; they want a referendum which would give them the option of choosing independence from the central government and Indonesia.

In 1999, there was a demonstration in front of the Grand Mosque in Banda Aceh which drew anywhere from 400,000 to a million people. That's anywhere from 10 percent to a quarter of the entire Acehese population of 4 million. In proportional terms, that makes it one of the largest political demonstrations in recent world history. The military responded to this demonstration by crushing the civilian political movement that was calling for referendum – assassinating, disappearing, raping activists, and continuing with the massacres that had already dotted Aceh with mass graves before the tsunami created new mass graves.

What are some of the connections between U.S. corporate interests and the Indonesian military repression in Aceh?

There's one main connection, and that's ExxonMobil. Their natural gas facility dominates the Acehese economy, by way of extraction. They also have Indonesian troops garrisoned on their property. The ExxonMobil company pays protection money to the Indonesian military and the military buries bodies of its victims on ExxonMobil lands.

As someone who operates in the United States, what did you think of the spectacle over the past couple

of days of U.S. military helicopters delivering aid, in sharp contrast to U.S. military operations over the past couple of years in Iraq, for instance?

It's bitterly ironic. You don't even have to go as far as Iraq to get an illustration of the role the U.S. has played. The Indonesian military is a long-time client of the U.S. The U.S. supported the military as they were bringing Suharto to power, as they were carrying out a massacre of anywhere from 400,000 to a million Indonesians during 1965-67. The U.S. gave the green light to the invasion of East Timor by the Indonesian military, which wiped out a third of the Timorese population, 200 000 people.

You've mentioned some problems with the established NGOs working in Indonesia and Aceh. Is there a way that people can contribute to the relief effort, and to efforts to raise awareness about the situation in Aceh more generally?

Give directly to the grassroots Acehese groups, which have been working for years with people in the refugee camps and which – even though their people are at risk – can deliver aid directly to the public because they do not have these contractual relationships with the Indonesian government and military. One such group is the People's Crisis Center (PCC) of Aceh, which for years has been going into the "re-education camps" working on disaster relief. Now the East Timor Action Network (ETAN) of the United States is channeling aid to the PCC and similar on-the-ground Acehese groups. So if people want to donate, they can go to the ETAN U.S. website, which is etan.org.

commentary

Germans Hit By Wave of Guilt

BY DERQ QUIGGLE

BOCHUM, Germany—German guilt over an unimaginably immense natural catastrophe emanates from the fact that many Germans (an estimated 40 percent) have vacationed in some part of the tsunami-hit region. The TV images of wiped out villages that once existed behind luxury resorts have awakened many German vacationers to the bitter poverty amid which they had blissfully sipped their margaritas while watching the tide roll in. Moreover, many Germans feel that they themselves dodged a bullet. They can empathize with the victims because they themselves have walked barefoot and bare-breasted over those very sands.

There are estimated to be around 1,500 German tsunami victims, according to Foreign Minister Joshka Fischer.

Reports from numerous agencies conclude that building codes, coupled with an adequate warning system would have contained the disaster and greatly reduced the death toll. It has become clear to many here that, while luxury tourism in the tsunami region was highly developed to cater to the tourist's every need, little attention was given to the most basic needs of the natives of those coastal regions. German President Horst Koehler responded to the tsunami by stating in a speech to the nation: "The giant waves have made it clear to us that we can not deny that we live together on one globe."

Germans who vacation in the Maldives and other "luxury resort islands" do tend to be among the upper echelon of

German society; the less wealthy get their sun in Mollaca.

It was the head of the German Protestant Church who announced how the tsunami is affecting German belief in God – that announcement, confirmed by a similar statement from the Archbishop of Canterbury, was reported both on the BBC and in the major German daily we read here in Bochum.

Some Germans of modest means did vacation in the tsunami region due to cheap vacation packages provided by travel agencies. Over the past decade, travel to the sex (is)lands has become very affordable. "One night in Bangkok" is often a vacationer's aspiration.

Sex tourism in that region of the world has been covered in numerous German-produced documentaries, and aired on ARTE, Phoenix and other PBS-like TV channels. Single males, between the ages of 35 and 65 compose the core group of German sex tourists. German males, in turn, are one of the core groups supporting the sex tourism industry in Asia. The BBC recently ran an in-depth article about the links between sex tourism in Thailand and the sex-slave trade in Germany and Europe.

The heads of various German agencies responsible for monitoring development in the Third World recently appeared on Germany's leading political talk show "Sabine Christiansen." Ministers performed backflips trying to explain why the economies of those coastal regions had been so lopsided and bent out of shape by tourism. They also pointed out that German aid-workers on the ground in the tsunami-hit regions have concentrated on getting German victims triaged and sent home. One hundred medical personnel of the field hospital set up by the German army have been repeatedly interviewed and assure Germans that they're doing all they can to help Germans.

The tsunami provides an opportunity to examine relations between wealthy Northern nations and poor Southern nations. That discussion will likely not take place. Some form

of warning system will be implemented. Building codes will continue to be ignored by notoriously corrupt governments, and local economies will continue to be warped even further by the trade in tourism.

In a few years, the tsunami disaster of 2004 (and the poverty of the surrounding villages) will be far from the mind of naked Germans sunbathing on the bright beaches of the Maldives.

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JEFF FAERBER

Political covert operations manufacture docile governments from Iraq to Ukraine

The Puppet Factory

Even as the White House decries the ominous prospect of Iranian influence on the upcoming Iraqi national elections, U.S.-funded organizations with long records of manipulating foreign democracies in the direction of Washington's interests are quietly involved in essentially every aspect of the upcoming Iraqi elections. Influential, U.S.-financed agencies describing themselves as "pro-democracy" but viewed by critics as decidedly anti-democratic have their hands all over Iraq's transitional process, from the formation of political parties to monitoring the Jan. 30 nationwide polls and possibly conducting exit polls that could be used to evaluate the fairness of the ballot-casting.

BY LISA ASHKENAZ CROKE & BRIAN DOMINICK

Two such groups – the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) – are part of a consortium of non-governmental organizations to which the United States has provided over \$80 million for political and electoral activities in post-Saddam Iraq. Both groups publicly assert they are nonpartisan, but each has extremely close ties to its namesake American political party. NDI is headed by former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who took over the chair from former president Jimmy Carter. Republican Senator John McCain chairs IRI.

Both groups are highly controversial and are described throughout much of the world as either helpful, meddling, or downright subversive, depending on who you ask. In some places their work has earned praise from independent grassroots democracy advocates, but in many Third World nations, both groups have been tied to alleged covert plans to install U.S.-favored governments.

The groups' separate but overlapping mandates in Iraq include educating Iraqis on the democratic process, training Iraqi organizations to monitor the elections and deal with electoral conflicts, and providing impartial advice and training to political parties, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which is funding the consortium's operations in Iraq.

USAID's literature says it provides contracts and grants to private organizations that help further "America's foreign policy interests in expanding democracy and free markets while improving the lives of citizens in the developing world."

NDI and IRI are two of four core organizations of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a self-described "non-profit, non-governmental, bipartisan, grant-making organization" that stated its purpose is "to help strengthen democratic institutions around the world."

Created during Ronald Reagan's first term to enhance overseas political influence weakened by Jimmy Carter's 1977 ban on CIA democracy front groups, NED's reputation as a promoter of democracy never truly thrived outside the United States.

The organization and its affiliates regularly encounter allegations that they have supported opposition candidates and promoted subversive movements in countries where governments – some democratically elected – are seen as threatening to U.S. interests. A recent article in *Mother Jones* magazine said IRI had trained leaders involved in both the 2002 coup attempt against Venezuela's populist president, Hugo Chavez, and the overthrow of Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide last winter.

WELCOME TO THE PUPPET FACTORY If the United Nations' mission is to oversee the election process itself, the U.S. groups are actively engaged in cultivating political parties. IRI appears to be working most heavily with the parties and politicians favored by Washington.

"USAID has learned that 'legitimate' leaders are not just found, they're made," wrote

"What remains outside of those boundaries is an alternative vision for Iraq—a completely different vision which might well be the vision a majority of Iraqis would have."

Herbert Docena, a research associate specializing in Iraq at the Bangkok-based activist think tank Focus on the Global South. In October, *Reuters* obtained documents from the U.S. State Department suggesting that the parties benefiting from U.S. support of the Iraqi political process would be limited to those considered by the United States. to be "democratic or moderate," and that the department was spending \$1 million on polling to determine "which candidates and parties are attracting the most support from the Iraqi people."

Such U.S.-backed groups, including the Islamic Dawa Party and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI), which now dominate the 100-member National Council selected amid controversy last August, participated in a series of six "training conferences" hosted by IRI this June.

According to IRI's website, "Topics ranged from candidate leadership skills to platform development ... thus offering emerging Iraqi civic and political organizations a chance to learn a full array of successful campaign techniques." The group has also provided instruction for Iraq's interim governing bodies, from the original Governing Council to the present administration.

IRI's relationship with the parties dominating Iraq's interim government raises the



OCCUPIED BUT UNBROKEN Children in their Sad'r City playground.

©ANDREW STERN/ANDREWSTERN.NET

question of how much influence it has had in determining the makeup of current coalitions being formed to vie for the 275-seat National Assembly come Jan. 30, which will in turn select a new government and write the country's permanent constitution.

IRI would not speak on the record about its activities. At NDI, its Democratic counterpart, Les Campbell, regional director for the Middle East and Africa, insisted that the organization does not favor any of Iraq's numerous political parties. "We work with all the parties, including the big and well-known ones," he said. "But we actually ... spend special efforts to find, for example, Sunni parties – ones that might represent the Sunni population."

Campbell estimated that NDI's contributions are probably disproportionately helpful to the more obscure, less experienced Iraqi parties – the ones that need assistance at nearly every level. "We have spent special effort trying to find people and parties that might reflect the views of the urban, sort of secular intellectuals," he said, "because we think that they are disadvantaged." Nevertheless, he was careful to point out that NDI officially has no interest in the outcome of the Iraqi elections.

A LIMITED POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Critics of the work carried out elsewhere by NDI and IRI are concerned that the groups' low profiles in Iraq are not driven just by security or institutional modesty. Professor William I. Robinson of the Global and International Studies Program at the University of California at Santa Barbara calls groups like NDI and IRI "extensions" of the U.S. State Department.

"I suspect that [NDI and IRI] are... trying to select individual leaders and organizations that are going to be very amenable to the U.S. transnational project for Iraq," Robinson said. He described those actors as willing to engage in "pacifying the country militarily and legitimating the occupation and the formal electoral system." He added that developing relationships with "economic, political and civic groups that are going to be favorable to Iraq's integration into the global capitalist economy" would prove even more important for U.S.-based organizations in the long run.

According to Campbell, NDI and IRI first became involved in Iraq shortly after the U.S. invasion in March 2003, using NED funds while getting their feet wet. In early 2004, the U.S. government allocated \$25 million to the NED to spread among its affiliate groups. Finally, in preparation for the 2005 vote, USAID gave more than \$80 million to NDI, IRI and others involved in the consortium set up to provide technical and political assistance to the electoral process.

Robinson says that U.S.-based organizations

will back numerous political parties in Iraq instead of just promoting one faction, but while those parties will represent different constituencies and different points on the political spectrum, they will all fall within boundaries acceptable to Washington. "What remains outside of those boundaries," he continued, "is an alternative vision for Iraq – a completely different vision which might well be the vision a majority of Iraqis would have."

"WE'RE DIGGING IN FOR THE LONG HAUL"

Right-wing critics have also questioned the record of the NED and its affiliate organizations. In an analysis written for the libertarian-conservative Cato Institute, Barbara Conry wrote that the NED's "mischief overseas" has amounted to U.S. taxpayers funding "special-interest groups to harass the duly elected governments of friendly countries, interfere in foreign elections, and foster the corruption of democratic movements." Last year, Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) took aim at the NED – particularly the roles of NDI and IRI – writing that the purposes for which both organizations are utilized elsewhere in the world "would be rightly illegal in the United States."

The apparently impromptu public protest in the Ukraine following the now-rescinded win by Russia's favored candidate, Victor Yanukovich, is believed to have been at least partly orchestrated by the NED. According to reports in the British *Guardian*, both NDI and IRI were involved in developing popular campaigns in support of Victor Yushchenko, the opposition candidate favored in the West whose defeat was immediately followed by condemnations of vote fraud in by both the U.S. State Department and the U.S. mass media. The Associated Press reported on Dec. 10 that the Bush administration spent \$65 million over the past two years to support opposition candidates in Ukraine.

One of the mechanisms U.S.-backed groups typically use to challenge unfavorable election results is exit polls and other tracking methods, which almost invariably show Washington's preferred candidates to have edged out their opponents. It is unclear whether IRI will engage in any exit polling or other verification methods on Jan. 30, but Campbell said NDI will not, citing "security and logistical" concerns that would render such activity impossible.

Regardless of how the Jan. 30 elections turn out, U.S.-backed nongovernmental organizations are likely to be involved in Iraq well into the future. "We're digging in for the long haul," said Campbell. "I would fully anticipate NDI being in Iraq five years from now or ten years from now."

Full report available at newstandardnews.net