



Workers of the World, Unite!

The MICHIGAN

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The Northeast Blackout of 2003...

Yes, it was terrorism

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Socialist Party USA: Outline of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY strives to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control: where working people own and control the means of production and distribution, through democratically-controlled committees and assemblies; where full employment is realized for everyone who wants to work; where workers have the right to form unions freely, and to strike and engage in other forms of job actions; and where the production of society is used for the benefit of all humanity, not for the private profit of a few. We believe socialism and democracy are one and indivisible.

The Socialist Party fights for progressive changes compatible with a socialist future. We support union and electoral actions — independent of the capitalist-controlled two-party system — to present socialist alternatives. We strive for democratic revolutions — radical and fundamental changes in the structure and nature of economic, political and social relations — to abolish the power now exercised by the few who control the economy and the government.

The Socialist Party is a democratic, multi-tendency organization, with structure and practices visible and accessible to all members.

commentary A personal affront

LAST MONTH, a federal jury in Michigan was given a horrific charge; they were asked to consider giving the death penalty to John Bass, a convicted murderer and drug dealer.

Bass was the leader of the underground capitalist corporation (known as a “street gang”) that went by the name, “Dawg Pound.” He was convicted of importing and selling cocaine, and killing a security guard (known as a “hit man”) for another underground capitalist entity that had killed Bass’ half brother in 1996.

While the crimes associated with Bass’ conviction are bad enough, it is the fate he possibly faced that was a bigger affront to the decency of all residents of Michigan.

The State of Michigan has an historical distinction of which it should be proud: it was the first modern government in the world, and the first state in the Union, to abolish the death penalty in all cases except treason.

When Michigan became a state in 1837, its initial constitution had allowed for capital punishment. In 1843, Michigan sentenced its first convicted criminal to death. After he was executed, it was discovered that he was innocent.

The citizens of the state were shocked and outraged. They remembered Thomas Jefferson’s dictum: better to let a thousand guilty men go free than execute an innocent man. Michigan reacted by amending the state constitution in 1846, forever outlawing the death penalty.

Since then, only two people have been sentenced to death in Michigan; federal juries sentenced both of them. The last person to be executed in Michigan was Anthony Chebatoris, who was hanged in 1938 for killing a truck driver.

But Bass’ conviction is not the only one to happen recently, and it will not be the last. In 2002, a federal jury in Grand Rapids sentenced Marvin Gabrion to death for killing a woman in the Manistee National Forest.

In addition, three more members of the “Dawg Pound” corporation await trial on federal charges that can bring the death penalty.



MARTIN
SCHREADER

This relative flurry of death penalty cases in Michigan is a result of the federal Attorney General, John Ashcroft, demanding “consistent” application of the death penalty, including in the 12 states that have outlawed it.

Previous attorneys general of the United States shied away from applying it in these states, respecting the wishes of its citizens.

But Ashcroft, who is known for his support of fascist organizations like the League of the South/Southern Party, Council of Conservative Citizens and the “Christian Reconstruction” movement, has no interest in respecting the rights of the people of Michigan.

Indeed, this is the man who has been the biggest proponent of expanding the powers given to him in the Nazi-esque “USA-PATRIOT Act.”

And, yes, the two issues are linked. Ashcroft and his bosses occupying the White House want to roll back all socially progressive change that has happened in this country since the Civil War.

Civil rights (including voting rights and affirmative action), abolition of the death penalty, the rights of the accused and social security (unemployment insurance, old age pension, etc.) — the Bush regime wants to abridge, curtail and/or eliminate all of these.

Opposition to the drive to eliminate these basic reforms should be the cause of all progressive-minded people, not just Socialists.

Every citizen of Michigan, especially the millions of working people in the state, need to organize and express their opposition to this attack on our rights through mass meetings, protests in front of the federal building and, given the upcoming election season, putting in office as many Socialist and radical candidates as possible. ★

national 'Terrorism market' allows glimpse into Pentagon's true character

By **MATT ERARD**

The Michigan Socialist

"ARE MORE PEOPLE going to be killed? You bet," said Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in reference to the U.S. occupation of Iraq, at a July 14 press conference.

At the time of the Pentagon leader's remark, few knew that such an ill-natured comment should be taken literally. However, betting on such events is exactly what the Pentagon was proposing at the time.

This was shown with the Bush administration's request for \$8 million, to begin the funding of its new terrorism futures market, named the Policy Analysis Market (PAM).

PAM differs greatly from other futures markets seen in the past for things such as ticket sales, oil prices, and election outcomes.

As the greatest purveyor of bloodshed in the world, could the Pentagon be expected to base its new market of predictions on anything other than international violence?

With a great deal of shock and very little surprise, the answer is simply no.

PAM would allow investors to bet on terrorist attacks and assassinations within Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Syria, as well as the consequences of United States involvement within those nations.

Featured examples included the overthrow of King Abdullah in Jordan and the assassination of Yasser Arafat. Investors who bet on correct predictions would make profits from the money of those who bet on predictions that turn out to be incorrect.

Although officially a market for Middle East bloodshed, the PAM website also included a North Korean missile attack as an example, extending the potential for profit from violence to right here at home.

PAM was to be a joint program of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), parent organization of the Total Information Awareness program,



The Pentagon's plan for the "Policy Analysis Market" would have allowed for investors to wager on the probability of war, terrorism and revolution. We wonder what 10,000 shares in "the collapse of American capitalism" would cost? Would the dividends be taxed?

now called Terrorism Information Awareness (TIA).

TIA would allow the government to tap into computer databases to spy on the medical, credit, travel and financial records of American citizens under the guise of "preventing terrorism."

Both the Total Information Awareness program and the Policy Analysis Market were to be headed by former National Security Adviser and convicted felon John Poindexter.

Poindexter was an instrumental figure in the Iran-Contra scandal, in which the Reagan administration secretly and illegally sold weapons to Iran and aided the import of cocaine into the United States, in order to fund the overthrow of the democratically-elected leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Poindexter was convicted on five felony counts including lying to Congress and obstructing the investigation of Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh.

Poindexter's convictions were later overturned on a technicality by a three-judge federal panel.

Most troublesome about the proposed market is that it would create a private, profitable interest in terrorism both at home and abroad.

Individuals with special knowledge about future terrorist attacks would find it in their best interest to keep quiet or even facilitate attacks if they are likely to make money on them.

According to PAM's website, speculators would remain anonymous and governmental agencies would not have access to the identities and funds of traders.

Although the website also states that government agencies are not allowed to participate the program, the undisclosed identities of many working in both American and international intelligence combined with the anonymity that the program offers, creates a system where terrorists ranging from al-Qaeda to the CIA could participate freely, with both prior knowledge and control over the results.

While not yet proven to be linked, due to the failure of the FBI, Securities and Exchange Commission, and Secret Service

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The struggle against the U.S./UK occupation of Iraq

The following is a presentation made by Nadia Mahmood of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq at the annual "Communist University," held in London by the Communist Party of Great Britain. The article has been corrected for American English grammar and spelling.

THE WCPI WAS established in July 1993 to bring into being a socialist republic in Iraq — by organizing the socialist tendency within the working class; by escalating mass confrontation of the whole class against their oppressor, whether the oppressor came in the shape of a fascist party like the Ba'ath Party or occupation of any other kind; and by organizing many sections of society around the working class political alternative, among, for example, young people, women, human rights advocates, freedom-lovers, etc.

That is the philosophy behind the establishment of the WCPI, and behind our political stand on the various issues and situations that we have been through since we formed our party.

In our struggle to achieve our aims, we have always looked at political transformation and any changes or developments from the workers' point of view.

Before any policy could be made, we had to analyze and evaluate whether these shifts would achieve the workers' aims and demands, whether it would push our struggle forward or not, and whether it would take us to new stage or push us back. That was, and is, our aim.

Dealing with the war and occupation, could they achieve workers' demands? Is it true that the war was launched to bring to us the freedoms we fought for years to gain?

Was the war launched for our welfare, for human rights? Are the workers benefiting from the current situation? The answer is clearly no.

You might ask: what are the workers saying in Iraq, what are they doing? What are their demands and have they a voice? Have they organized themselves?

As you know, we have had 35 years of dictatorship under the dominance of the Ba'ath regime. Thirteen years of economic

sanctions and three wars have left the workers isolated and deprived them of the opportunity for political intervention to determine their future.

For that reason, the U.S. has brought onto the political scene the Iraqi bourgeoisie, Islamic leaders, nationalists, heads of tribes, ex-generals, and former Ba'ath Party members.

I could say the U.S. has gathered the right wing of Iraqi society and formed from them as the "governing council."

The workers and the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq are forming the left wing in society. They are standing together. Now after four months of the war and occupation, the whole of society has collapsed.

There is no water, no electricity, no communications, no jobs, no security, no education, no health system, no policing — nothing.

Most industry and service facilities and institutions have been rendered out of action, and thousands of factories and smaller workshops have closed their doors, either due to lack of water and electricity or lack of security.

Reports are being widely circulated that the U.S. is thinking of privatizing the public sector.

This clearly means an increase in unemployment among workers. Millions are out of work already with absolutely no means of earning a living.

They are threatened with hunger, while food rations, which were distributed by the previous regime, are rapidly running out.

Now, in the aftermath of the war, we have started organizing workers, the unemployed, talking to women in their own organizations and holding mass meeting. The media gave very little attention to this.

Groups of activists in the labor movement, the workers and unemployed founded the Union of the Unemployed in Iraq on May 24. The UUI wanted to bring all unemployed workers together and to push



U.S. occupation troops face a crowd of angry Iraqi citizens demanding that they leave.



Members of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq, and its sister organization, the Worker-Communist Party of Iran, march against the U.S./UK invasion of Iraq in Trafalgar Square, London.

forward their basic demands.

The Union of the Unemployed in Iraq has 85,000 members in al-Nasiriya alone. I do not have the latest figures from Baghdad and Kirkuk, as they are increasing on a daily basis.

Since the founding of the UUI there have been weekly demonstrations to draw the attention of the occupying forces to our conditions, but there has been no response to its demands so far.

These demands are for securing either jobs or unemployment insurance, and demands for emergency allowances to all those who are unemployed, with full payments to all those who lost their jobs because of the war.

On July 29, the UUI organized demonstrations in the three major cities of Baghdad, Nasiriya and in Kirkuk.

In Nasiriya on July 29, it was agreed with the Italian forces, which control the city, that the UUI will distribute food to the people there. This will give some power to the workers and UUI.

In Baghdad, the UUI organized a sit-in in front of the headquarters of the U.S. civil administration (the former Republic Palace).

The U.S. forces arrested 19 members, among them Qasim Hadi, the secretary of the Union of the Unemployed in Iraq. The

detained protesters were brutally assaulted and tortured.

There were other demonstrations organized in May, June and July. Yanar Mohamad, along with other women in the WCPI, have established an organization demanding freedom for women and have taken part in organizing women in the UUI and workers' councils.

The women's freedom activists call on women to leave their homes and join the workers' movement. Workers have established workers' councils and trade union organizations.

Other actions have been taken too: for example, there have been demonstrations amongst different sections of workers on the railways, in petrol stations and many other industries.

Their demands range from paying the arrears owed to them, to calling for all casual workers to be made permanent, and to stop privatizing petrol stations. The workers are sending delegates to negotiate with those administrating their areas of work.

The Worker-Communist Party of Iraq believes that the struggle of unemployed people, or workers' councils, will not only achieve economic gains for those who work in Iraq, but is also a political answer to the current situation.

Achieving the demands of the unem-

ployed, the workers and women will elevate the expectations of the masses, and will prevent the reactionary forces like the nationalists (Ba'athist) and Islamic groups from exploiting the suffering of the workers and splitting their ranks.

It will improve security and political stability and therefore will give the people a chance to return to their jobs.

The struggle of the Union of the Unemployed, workers' councils and trade unions will help the masses to decide their future after decades of staying on the periphery.

Our stand is to get the forces of the U.S. out of Iraq. The existence of the U.S. in Iraq will cause insecurity, and has turned Iraq into a field of political liquidation.

With the presence of U.S. forces, the Islamists and nationalists will be revived under the flag of "against occupation." It will raise nationalist and Islamic feeling among the most devastated and desperate people.

Islamic and nationalist groups will appear on the political stage as "liberators" from the "invasion," which is not the case.

They have no brighter agenda than the U.S. has for the Iraqi people. They will hijack the people's resistance against the occupation and use it for their interests.

In the demonstration that took place in al-Nasiriya on July 3, the Islamic groups attacked the 7,000 demonstrators on the UUI march. They could not bear the idea of political activities organized outside of their mosques.

Moqtada al-Sadir, who was trained by the Iranian intelligence, called for protests against the occupation by forming an Islamic Army. The al-Sadir group kidnapped our comrades on July 22, 23 and 24, and they burned our headquarters in al-Nasiriya.

So, in addition to the fact that the U.S. occupation will keep the situation on the edge of explosion and exploits human and natural resources in the interests of a few companies, it is also supporting the most reactionary forces in Iraq, the heads of tribes and ethnocentric parties.

Let me say a few words about the situa-
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This presentation was originally printed in the August 28, 2003, issue of *Weekly Worker*, paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), and on the website of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI).



On the Internet:
WCPI - www.wpiraq.org
CPGB - www.cpgb.org.uk

The Northeast Blackout of 2003:

Yes, it was terrorism

By **MARTIN SCHREADER**

Editor, the *Michigan Socialist*

LAST MONTH, residents of the northeastern United States and the Canadian province of Ontario were the victims of terrorism.

At approximately 4:10 p.m., Thursday, August 14, 2003, power stations from southeastern Michigan to northern New Hampshire went down, leaving millions of people in the dark.

In New York City, hundreds of thousands of workers, heading home on a hot August afternoon, were trapped as subways and commuter trains came to a halt.

The scenes of weary commuters walking across the Brooklyn Bridge and emerging from dark subway tunnels evoked memories in many of the fate of millions of New Yorkers in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Across Pennsylvania and Ohio, and across most of the metropolitan Detroit area, public utilities collapsed; the wastewater treatment plant for southeast Michigan, for example, stopped functioning properly soon after the blackout began.

Local businesses — including almost all gas stations and grocery stores — closed down, leaving millions without access to food, drinkable water or gasoline. Roads were choked for hours as workers and other local residents fought their way from intersection to intersection.

In many places, the sudden and complete loss of power led to even greater disaster. The Marathon petroleum refinery in southwest Detroit exploded when the electricity that kept the fuel condensers cool cut off, causing the superheated oil vapor to burst into flames.

In southeastern Michigan, the power surge that immediately preceded the blackout damaged seven power transformer stations operated by DTE Energy.

As fewer and fewer power stations were forced to handle the added demand for elec-



Before and after: Two satellite images of the mid-Atlantic states before the blackout (left) and the morning after.

tricity, they either shut down or exploded.

In the first crucial hours of the blackout, the Michigan government hesitated. Governor Jennifer Granholm had initially relied on the information given to her by DTE Energy officials. However, as the sun set on Thursday, Granholm finally declared a state of emergency in the metro Detroit area.

For his part, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, the agent of DTE and other major capitalist interests in the City, hid behind a wall of blue, mobilizing the entire police force and turning the streets of Detroit into an armed camp. It was not until Friday that Kilpatrick turned his attention to the residents.

Meanwhile, the deserter-in-chief, George W. Bush, took five minutes out of his busy schedule of golf and fundraising for California Republican gubernatorial candidate (and devoted friend of convicted Austrian Nazi Kurt Waldheim) Arnold Schwarzenegger to express his “concern” for the plight of the millions of residents of the

northeast.

By Saturday, Aug. 16, power began to return to most of the areas affected by the blackout. Major cities like New York, Pittsburgh and Detroit had restored power in most areas.

By the following Monday, all that was left to do was pick up the pieces and ask the simple question, “What happened?”

TERRORISM. When one speaks of such a thing, it often calls to mind images of masked men brandishing weapons, hijackings, assassination and wholesale destruction.

In a time that is shaped, whether we like it or not, by the effects of the attacks of Sept. 11, most Americans have a very definite view of what terrorism is.

But there are actually many types of terrorism. Simply speaking, terrorism is the use of violence and terror by someone to get what they want, and thus there are many specific types of terrorism in today’s society.

There is, of course, the terrorism of guerrilla organizations. This kind of terrorism is meant to achieve a political goal, like the removal of foreign troops from a given region, or the end of policies perceived as repressive.

These kind of terrorist groups range in politics from left to right, though not one of them represents anything other than the frustration and exasperation of the so-called "middle class" — independent producers (e.g., farmers and peasants), small business owners, professionals, etc.

Another kind of terrorism is where guerrilla organizations operate as a proxy for capitalist states.

These groups use the tactics of terror to achieve ends that best serve their paymasters. Sometimes, these terrorists will use the same rhetoric as the self-sustained guerrilla organizations, but not for the same ends.

Politically speaking, these groups are found, more or less, on the right wing. The Nicaraguan *contras* and Afghan *mujahedin* of the 1980s were state-sponsored terrorist organizations (the state that sponsored them, of course, was the United States).

But there is a third kind of terrorism — one that does not rely on anonymous groups of masked guerrillas to carry out their tasks or achieve their goals. These terrorists do not necessarily need guns or bombs to terrorize a civilian population.

The famed documentary filmmaker and author, Michael Moore, in his first book, *Downsize This!*, opened with the contrasting of two horrific images. The first picture was of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, Okla., after it had been destroyed by a terrorist attack.

The second picture was of the old Fisher Body auto factory in Flint, Mich., the site of the 1936-37 sit-down strike, and at the time a rotting hulk of steel and concrete.

Moore asked a pointed question in comparing these two images: "What is Terror-

ism?" Is terrorism only the act of relatively isolated, desperate people, plotting secretly and illegally?

Is it any less terrorism if it is carried out by "respectable" people in the name of profit, and done openly and legally?

More to the point, is it any less terrorism if the methods are different, but the effect is the same?

Simply put, the answer is no. From the perspective of the victim, there is little or no difference.

Both the victim of individual terrorism and the victim of capitalist terrorism suffer the privations; both victims grieve the losses of loved ones; both victims will never live the same lives again.

Capitalism is terrorism in its highest and most developed form. It is the systematic coercion of whole peoples through intimidation, threats and violence.

Whereas the terrorism of armed guerrillas is demonized as the "greatest evil" ever to befall society, the terrorism of armed capitalists is lauded and hailed as "the pinnacle of human achievement."

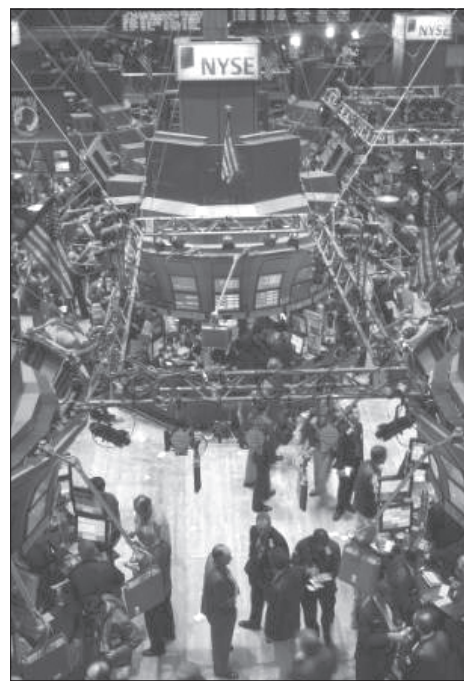
THIS BRINGS US back to the blackout. It is the opinion of this author that the blackout was an act of terrorism.

It was not an act of terrorism in the sense that masked men with high explosives targeted power plants with the goal of plunging the U.S. into darkness.

No. It was an act of terrorism in the sense that the actions of the power utility capitalists led directly to this attack on the residents of the northeast, and the terrorizing of millions of Americans and Canadians.

Since the 1980s, the power utility bosses have pushed for greater deregulation of their industry. They have demanded this from state and federal governments, and have used threats, intimidation and bribes to achieve their goals.

California is a prime example of the kind of attacks these power utilities have waged.



While New Yorkers were suffering in the August heat because of the blackout, guess what had full power?

Millions of people in that state have been subjected to everything from environmental devastation, and utility bills doubled and trebled every year, to rolling blackouts, increased unemployment due to failing businesses and death.

Whatever anyone can say about the effects the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, had on the communities and people of New York and Washington, D.C., can also be said about the effects energy deregulation and downsizing have had on the people of California and other places.

And that is the point. Is it any less terrorism if the methods are different, but the effect is the same?

The effects of utility deregulation have only brought misery and tragedy. The drive for maximum profits at the expense of the welfare and well being of the people finds its most barbaric forms in the "free competition" by power companies.

Do the energy capitalists expect that working people receiving low wages can pay a heat bill of \$300-plus during the winter months? If so, what do they expect people to give up exchange? Food? Clothing? Shelter?

This kind of coercion and extortion is a form of economic terrorism. But, since it is legal and hailed as part of the "pinnacle of

Capitalism is terrorism in its highest and most developed form. It is the systematic coercion of whole peoples through intimidation, threats and violence.



While retirees tried to stay cool (top), and residents tried to find gas (2nd from top) and food (above), Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm (below left) hesitated, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick (below right) called the cops and George W. Bush (bottom left) tried to think.



human achievement," the capitalists expect that you will silently accept it.

DO NOT ACCEPT it, silently or otherwise. It has been the acceptance of this terrorism hitherto that has allowed the energy capitalists — and all capitalists, for that matter — to commit such acts.

Socialists call for the public ownership of energy utilities, under the democratic control and management of the energy workers themselves. This is not the same as re-regulation or state control.

Re-regulation is simply trying to turn back the hands of time. Anything that can be regulated can also be de-regulated.

Thus, re-regulation is at best a temporary measure, and cannot solve any problems.

State control of public utilities is also not a good solution. As long as capitalism rules society, state control of utilities will mean that the capitalist drive for profit will govern its actions. It will be a case of "meet the new boss, same as the old boss."

Even state administration under a democratic socialist government would be full of dangers.

With the state substituting itself for the capitalists, the demand for an increasingly powerful bureaucracy — to

serve as both buffer between workers and the state, and to serve as the "on-the-ground" managers — will lead to the re-emergence or sharpening of class distinctions and, with them, class antagonisms and the class struggle.

If a state is going to maintain a formal "ownership" of an industry, the only way to avoid the development of a crushing bureaucracy is to ensure that the workers (possibly in conjunction with consumers) exercise democratic control over its operations.

Organized bodies of workers from all sections of the facility, elected as representatives from their departments, would be able to choose who functions as management and administration, and for how long.

If necessary, they could possibly rely on "specialists" — former managers who are willing to help with the work — for advice and assistance. But, the workers themselves would be the people responsible.

This is democratic socialism in action: working people joining together, thinking things through and acting on their decisions. It is at once the most democratic and the most efficient system possible.

No waste, no bureaucratic red tape, no fat CEO salaries, no petty concerns about "profit." That is socialism in action. ★

Iraq

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tion for women — surprisingly we do not have any records or information about kidnapped or raped women in the days of the war, but now every day we are receiving new reports about the raping and abduction of women, by local people or by American soldiers.

The Worker-Communist Party of Iraq and the working class have one aim: to end occupation and establish local councils.

We have set up the first local council in Kirkuk city and we want to take this to other cities in Iraq.

The occupation, as well as wars and economic sanctions, have been approved by bourgeois parties in Iraq, by nationalist parties and Islamic parties,

but have been strongly opposed by workers.

Workers have no common interests with the puppet "governing council."

Finally I would ask you to support Iraqi people, Iraqi workers, morally and financially. International solidarity will empower workers in Iraq to stand on their feet.

Any donations, from individuals or organizations, would be very much appreciated. Visit our website, read our newspaper. If you could arrange to visit Iraq, that would be a great initiative.

I believe strongly we have to end the unipolar world.

We have to replace the new world order based on this unipolar world, with another one, and western government with the workers' council republic and help open the road to communism over the world again. ★

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Market

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to publish reports on their promised investigations, the rush of trades on financial markets in the two weeks before September 11, 2001, indicating prior knowledge of the attacks, serve as only a microcosm of the situation PAM would likely create.

Although the plug was pulled on PAM (at least for now) after its public exposure by Senators Byron Dorgan (D-ND) and Ron Wyden (D-OR), only days before reg-

istering was set to begin, the fact that PAM made it as far as it did is a perfect demonstration of the thing that surrounds nearly every action taken and move made in the name of "national security."

It is neither safety nor liberation, neither freedom nor patriotism; it is profit making.

It is undeniable that the Pentagon, from its inception, has been the world's largest generator of corporate welfare. During "peacetime," wartime, and post-Bush never-ending wartime, the Pentagon serves as the base for nearly every element of the

advanced-technology industry in the United States.

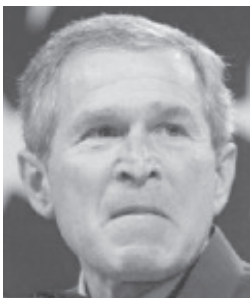
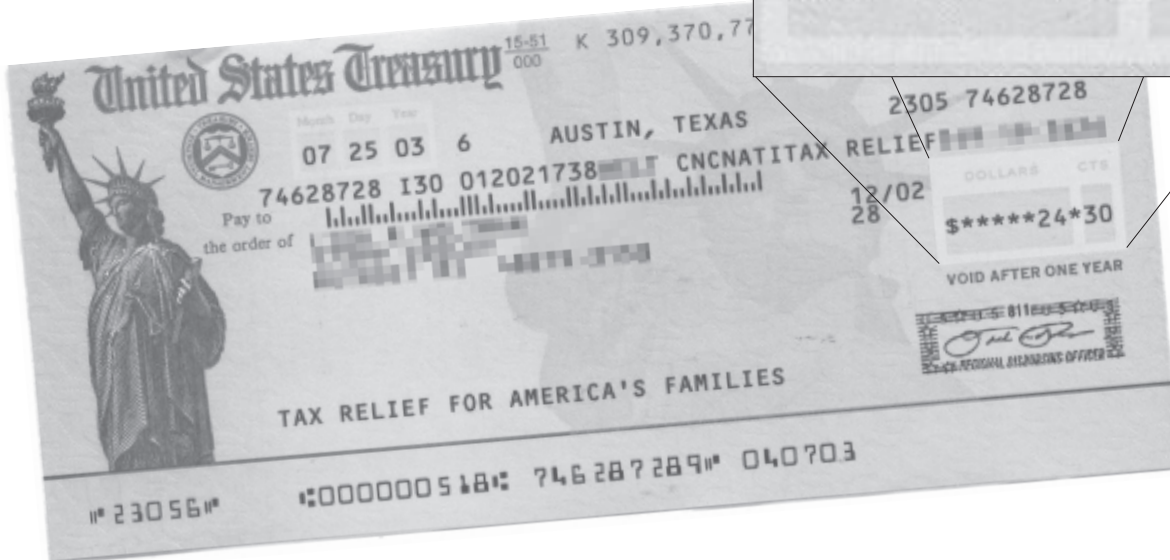
PAM, although shockingly real, can best be seen as a satire of the maternal relationship between the Pentagon and the wealthy private sector, and the guiding force of profits behind everything that the Pentagon does.

While terrorism speculation markets are only a new leaf in the Pentagon's unending crusade to enrich the wealthy, it should serve as a prime example to all working people of whose interests it really has at heart. ★

"Ninety-two million Americans will keep an average of \$1,083 more of their own money. A family of four with two earners and \$39,000 in income will receive more than \$1,100 in tax relief — real money to help pay the bills and push the economy forward."

— George W. Bush, January 7, 2003

**'Average'?!
Is this what you mean
by 'average?'**



**Thanks, George!
You cheap bastard!**

This message brought to you by the staff of the Michigan Socialist

Living wage

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tract with city government pay their workers enough to live on are already in place in several cities in Michigan, including, Detroit, Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township, Warren, Washtenaw County, Monroe County, Pittsfield Township, Eastpointe, Ann Arbor, Ferndale, Taylor and Southfield.

Generally, such ordinances guarantee that any one paid the minimum required — \$9.20/hour for workers with employer-paid health care and \$11.50/hour for those who do not in the case of the one being pushed in the Lansing area — could pay for an average-priced apartment in their area without having to spend an exorbitant portion of their income on rent.

Not exactly radical stuff, especially as such ordinances passed by local governments can only be applied (unfortunately) to employers who receive contracts from local government.

In the Lansing area, a small core of union activists and community allies has been pushing for something similar for a long time, often facing an uphill battle to get support from other community organizations.

The first major victory came with the Ingham County Board of Commissioners, the committee of which charged with considering the matter met in early June to make a recommendation to the full Board.

This meeting was packed with trade unionists and community activists, including all of the active SPMI members in the



Lansing area, and no one could miss the fact that the commissioners (who are far more accustomed to the public ignoring them) were acting uncomfortably aware of this unwelcome intrusion by the general public.

Predictably, the most vocal opposition came from those commissioners most openly in the pocket of the Chamber of Commerce, particularly rural, suburban Republicans “representing” the most severely under-unionized parts of the County.

One such Commissioner argued that the costs of enforcing the measure would be an extravagance that would make the County look “fiscally irresponsible.”

After all, he said, if Ingham had to request assistance from other Counties for its upcoming airport project, why should they “help us out” when the County wasted “free money” that they could have done anything with on making sure that workers in companies with County contracts have a living wage.

This prompted several people present, including a member of the Socialist Party, to get up to denounce this Commissioner’s “obscene” remarks in the public comment section towards the end of the meeting.

By far the best exchange of the meeting came when Mike Severino, a Republican Commissioner from Holt, finally came into the meeting and took his seat.

He had skipped most of the meeting, but apparently his opposition to allowing the workers cleaning the building enough money to pay for food, housing and other ex-

travagances, was sufficient to convince him to make it for the last five minutes and the vote.

He lamely argued that to spend the money necessary to enforce the Living Wage ordinance in such a way would be a “slap in the face” to County employees, suggesting somewhat duplicitously that the money could perhaps be spent on a raise for them. (Even though contract negotiations had been completed and their new contract already voted on by that point.)

This prompted Pat Sonnenberg, a County Health Department employee and a member of UAW Local 2256, to get up in the public comment section, livid with anger. She pointed out that she was after all a County employee and a member of the bargaining committee at that, and that they already had a living wage.

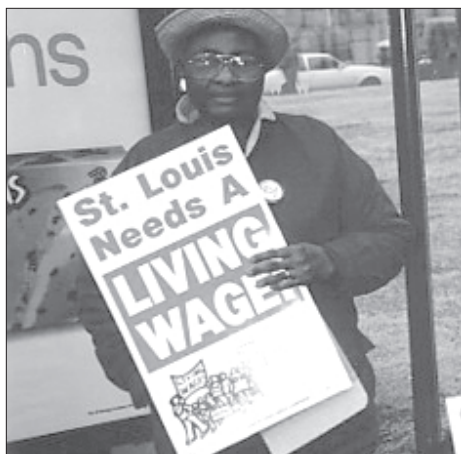
“How dare you suggest that we would even accept a raise if the cost was that the working poor get nothing?”

In the end, the committee and the Board as a whole adopted this fairly modest proposal and the campaign organizers set their sights on the city of Lansing.

Mayor Tony Benavides, about to face reelection, surrendered to public opinion and decided to implement the proposed ordinance as an executive order.

One certainly wonders, however, if it were simply a matter of “doing the right thing” as he claims, why he only got around to it after the successful grass-roots campaign on the County level!

This was clearly such a popular move



Movements for “living wage” ordinances, like this one, in St. Louis, Mo., are springing up all over the country.

that nearly all of the candidates in the first phase of the Mayoral election had to at least pay lip service to some form of a living wage.

Benavidas' major competitor, Virg Bernero, made it clear in his response that he was opposed to the existing executive order or any other even remotely meaningful living wage ordinance, criticizing Benavidas for not looking at "all sides" of the issue.

He said that, in contrast, he would only support a living wage measure that satisfied "all sides," making clear that that this very much included the Chamber of Commerce.

This would have been the exact equivalent of a politician in the South in the 1950s saying that he would only support a civil rights ordinance amenable to "all sides," including the White Citizen's Councils.

This is the sort of thing that every one expects to play well in the editorial pages of the *Lansing State Journal*, a Gannett-owned rag with a history of slandering the antiwar movement and refusing to run corrections.

That said, many local activists involved in these struggles were shocked to see the *City Pulse* — the local "alternative" paper that is generally seen as a "liberal" alternative — endorse Bernero after he made this comment.

The *Pulse's* editorial endorsing Bernero essentially shrugged off the issue, claiming that as "the big picture goes, a living wage is not crucial to achieving Lansing's

Students at Harvard University stage occupation of administration offices to demand a living wage for teaching assistants and other school workers.



dreams."

Of course, the alternative should not be to vote for typical Democratic Party politicians like Benavidas, who is no more a thorn in the Chamber's side in his day-to-day management of the city than any other such bureaucrat disguised as a politician.

Indeed, Benavidas' campaign billboards emphasize not his politics but his "experience," making it clear that he is marketing himself simply as a more or less efficient bureaucratic functionary.

Rather than crediting Benavidas for his belated surrender to the wishes of his constituents, we should credit the movement that put him in that position, and can and should continue the struggle for more and better protections around the area and outside of it, regardless of which non-entity sits in the mayor's seat after this fall.

If waiting politely for the public comment sections at local government meet-

ings doesn't get the job done, then sitting in at the mayor's office might get the point across more effectively. A one-day general strike to show that Lansing's residents mean business might be better still.

On the electoral front, what we need aren't more almost indistinguishable candidates from the two parties that the owning class trust with managing their system, but rather strong campaigns by democratic socialist candidates who will use their offices, if elected, not to passively surrender to movement pressure but to fight as part of that movement and publicize its goals.

It's unclear at this point whether the majority of them will be on the ballot as independents or as Green Party candidates or whether indeed our party will have succeeded in gaining independent ballot access by then, but you can count on the SPMI to start fielding candidates like that across the state in the 2004 elections. ★

Kucinich

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ed, by becoming apathetic and not supporting whomever became the Democratic candidate.

Upon Kucinich's arrival, to the singing of "We Shall Not Be Moved," the audience livened up with standing applause and cheers.

Kucinich came in thanking the organizers, and jumped directly into a rant against the Iraq war and occupation, the Bush Doctrine of pre-emption, and called for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and a 15 percent cut to the outrageous military budget of over \$400 billion.

He called for an America that thinks from the heart and embraces the world community with a vision of peace and uni-

ty, not separation and chaos.

On domestic issues, Kucinich briefly spoke about the need for universal health care, with touching stories of people he has spoken to throughout his campaign.

He concluded his speech with a brief mention of "college for all citizens" and "for free! for free!" as the reception was forced to end due to a 7 p.m. senior event requiring the room.

Outside, a handful of questions arose on how people could help him. This reporter had a couple pointed questions that could not be asked or answered.

Kucinich had said that all Iraqi oil is for the Iraqi people and there should be no privatization. Would he would apply that logic to the United States and nationalize all resources from oil, mining, water, electricity, heat, etc.? After all, if public ownership is good enough for the Iraqi people,

should it not be for the American people?

What electoral reforms, if any, would he enact to ensure democracy and a voice for all citizens? Specifically, what would his campaign do for the Socialist Party, or other "third parties," to even consider supporting him?

Indeed, Kucinich sounds like a good candidate — for the Democratic Party. However, the problem is he is not a socialist, and only pushes for the social-capitalism of Europe.

There was no reason given why the Greens, Socialists and others at this event should support him, other than declaring himself to be the "only" antiwar candidate who is also for social justice, and "one of us" (whatever that means). ★



On the Internet:
www.kucinich.us



'Fiscal responsibility' and human rights in Lansing

By **BEN BURGIS**

The Michigan Socialist

ACCORDING TO conventional wisdom, workers who are lucky enough to have a job at any given moment should be grateful to their employers for "giving" them one.

In exchange for their labor, the owning class "pays" them a certain salary. Of course, socialists have always questioned the meaningfulness of this terminology.

Value is produced by those who, well, work. General Motors gets the money that goes into both wages and profits from selling cars. Those cars are manufactured by workers.

A study done in 1995 estimated that for

every dollar paid to American workers by manufacturing companies, the latter took in about \$5.39 in profits.

(And that's the ratio for workers with "good jobs" in union shops. Imagine the ratio everywhere else!)

So, in a much more meaningful sense, the workers who manufacture the cars sold by General Motors could be said to pay their bosses the bulk of what they earn by manufacturing and selling cars.

As Socialists, the core of our political perspective is that executives and stockholders are worthless employees who provide no useful service in exchange for the generous income they are paid by the working class.

As such, they should be fired.

Of course, it should be understood that the "victims" of this cost-cutting proposal will never agree to it and that they will (and indeed have) resisted its implementation anywhere in the world by any means at their disposal.

Still, even within the confines of the current arrangement, there are after all still some laws regulating the amount of money that workers are entitled to keep for themselves after most of their earnings have been taken by the owning classes.

Indeed, "living wage" ordinances granting some form of (fairly minimal and inadequate) guarantee that companies that con-

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Kucinich: Nice words, but a little late

By **JOE DeNEEN**

The Michigan Socialist

ON TUESDAY, August 26, a reception was held in Flint Township for Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), one of nine candidates for the Democratic Presidential nomination.

Congressman Kucinich spoke predominately on his antiwar and peace stance and briefly glossed over his universal health care and education platform.

Unfortunately, he departed within an hour and after ten minutes of supportive questions from the audience.

The event was organized on short notice, held at the Flint Township Carman-Ainsworth Senior Center, and scheduled from 4:45 to 6 p.m.

However, Kucinich did not arrive until shortly after 6 p.m. and his campaign manager drove him away an hour later to go to his next stop in Southfield.

The audience of approximately 50 peo-



Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-OH).

ple was predominately members of Michigan Citizens for Peace and the Democratic Party, and included individuals of all ages.

The composition of the audience was white and middle class; not a single African American, and only a handful from the working class.

The tardiness did not sit well with many, though only a handful left disgusted, including a reporter from the local Fox television station.

One attendee was left unsatisfied and unimpressed with the lateness and shortness of Kucinich who spoke little on the issues — it was a pep rally for his supporters.

While waiting for Kucinich, the Chairman of the Genesee County Democratic Party, John Nickola, spoke at length, calling on the audience to join the Democrats, to bring the fight to Bush.

Nickola employed the usual rant, "you are allowed to disagree with 20 percent of our platform and disagreement is your democratic right," to motivate individuals to join.

(Sorry John, we Socialists oppose capitalism, so that "20 percent" is huge!)

He also made many references to "evil" people, and one reference sums up the "big tent" mentality of the "left" Democrats.

He implied that if the audience's candidate (Kucinich) lost the nomination, they would be allowing "evil people" to be elect-

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