

# The Michigan Socialist

Winter/Spring 2006



## The Real State of the Union

**Consequential Times? Reflections On An Evening With George Bush**

By Raul Cano

**Protecting Marriage from Gay Martian Hybrids: The Surreal Universe of George W. Bush**

By Ben Burgis

Plus **Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice (MECAWI): Vital Force or Fading Ghost** by Jim Griffin, **Capitalism and Feminism** by George Kropog and **A Joint Statement on Defending Democracy in Benton Harbor**

*The Michigan Socialist is the publication of the Socialist Party of Michigan, a revolutionary democratic socialist and feminist party of the working class. See*

*<http://www.spmichigan.org> for more information.*

## THE STATE OF THE BUSH REGIME, 2006

### Consequential Times? Reflections On An Evening With George Bush

By Raul Cano

*Co-Chair, Socialist Party USA*

Companeros:

In a celebration of the status quo, the current government of the United States cheered as President Bush laid out the plans for continuing war, economic imperialism and a domestic policy ill prepared to meet the needs of the country.

In a bit of political foreshadowing, the news agencies gave us bits and pieces to prime us to its message. A talking head labeled it a "vision thing", but in the end, it was the manifest destiny of the 21st century.



Bush declared that in these "consequential times" the nation needed to unite against the enemies of freedom, the voices of isolationism, and those that would undermine the leadership needed to fulfill these goals. In a key moment in the speech, he announced that the decisions regarding the War against Iraq and terrorism would be handled by the military and not by politicians.

I saw a man solidifying his power and calling for bipartisanship in a weak attempt to present the appearance of true opposition to his agenda.

The enemies of freedom and democracy were presented: the Axis of Evil, Burma, Zimbabwe, Iran, Syria and Hamas. Iraq was provided as an example of the "victories" that would flow. The World was presented as being on the brink of a capitalist utopia if we would surrender to the vision.



In a paternal way, Bush declared that those that sought state control of the economy were nothing more than infantile isolationists. The answer to our diminishing industrial base was the hard realism of the free market. US workers just had to learn to adapt to the new reality.

In a moment of naked truth, Bush declared that immigrant labor was an essential part of economic progress. A rational guest worker program was promised, the border would be militarized, and no amnesty would be offered. The immigrant worker was presented as nothing more than a tool for economic success. Its results? More death and civil rights abuses will come from the border, more fuel for the racism that pits worker against worker, more workers as second class "guests" primed for exploitation, and millions of clandestinos robbed of their hard earned right to remain in this country.

Domestically, Bush praised the growth of the economy as an indication of its success. Tax breaks were presented as the answer for more growth. Privatized

healthcare and savings accounts as the panacea to the outrageous cost of profit driven health care. The baby boomers were once again blamed for the impending disaster that is facing the Medicare program. The destiny of our nation is dependent on personal responsibility and the dismantling of the welfare state as we know it.

In short, these consequential times require that we maintain the status quo. These ARE indeed consequential times. Fascism is presented as the only option to the growth of fundamentalism throughout the world. The liberal left in the "first" world, paralyzed in a reformist mode, cannot provide a vision that gives the poor, of this and other countries, the tools for their own liberation. These are the times when those that fight for true social and economic equality not only have to choose sides, but step up as THE option to the status quo. We have to develop the alternatives to the two party system and destroy the illusion that is the Democratic Party.



We have to join the international networks of resistance against capitalism. We have to go beyond softening capitalism's blows against democracy and humanity and call for its end.

The fight is daunting, but the success of peoples' movements throughout the world, both electoral and in armed resistance, only give us hope for a world

were capitalism, fundamentalism and fascism are not the only options for the oppressed of the world. A world were socialism, in its most revolutionary form, is the answer to our struggle.

Todo el Poder al Pueblo!



### **Protecting Marriage from Gay Martian Hybrids: The Surreal Universe of George W. Bush**

By Ben Burgis

*Editor, The Michigan Socialist*

It's traditional for Presidents to announce major initiatives at their State of the Union addresses. Since he stole the 2000 Presidential election, "President" Bush has brought this to new heights. Just in case you were thinking about changing the channel, Bush comes through with a really interesting major new initiative to announce: cluster-bombing tens of thousands of people and engaging in a long-term military occupation in the heart of the Arab world (2003), amending the constitution to stop certain folk from getting married (2004) and privatizing Social Security (2005) were all highlights.

In recent years, though, things have started to shift in an interesting direction. If you haven't noticed—like, say, you've been living in a cave for the last two years—the popularity of Bush personally, of the neo-conservative gang he acts as figurehead for in general and even of the bipartisan agenda of Empire-building abroad and tightening the screws at home have all taken a hit. If a

long trail of stolen elections, war crimes and attempts to undermine the last shreds of constitutional liberty weren't enough, more recent developments have been.

The rise of anti-war resistance among military families, symbolized by Cindy Sheehan demanding to know what "noble cause" her son died for, combined with the spectacle of the Bush regime fiddling while New Orleans drowned (wasting untold amounts of cash and manpower needed for the rescue effort on making the world safe for Halliburton), has created a dent in El President's image that even the most willfully insular Bush cronies haven't been able to ignore. You no longer sound like an insane communist plotter—you know, some one like me—if you say the "i" word in public. You know, "impeachment."



In point of fact, far higher percentages of the U.S. public support impeaching the War-Criminal-in-Chief now than supported impeaching Clinton back when Congress actually did vote to impeach him for certain events involving cigars, phone calls and semen-stained dresses. (As I recall—it's been a while since I read the Starr Report, but it was pretty riveting stuff.)

Of course, the official "opposition" party isn't willing to embrace or even mention the "i" word. (You have to wonder what would it take exactly. U.S. troops bogged down in house-to-house fighting in Toronto? The White House hiring gangsters to assassinate Hilary Clinton,

then saying that under it's "interpretation" of the Constitution it's OK?)



In any case, one hopes this fact will get more and more people—who, out of the best of motives, keep on voting for Democrats election after election—thinking about whether the Democrats really represent the opposition to the Bush agenda or simply the other side of the coin of corporate plunder and militarism, bickering about details but keeping those differences within the family. And that's a line of thought that gets us farther down the line that leads from the "i" word to the "r" word, from throwing out George W. Bush to throwing out the whole system that produces George W. Bush's.

But I digress.

The fact that the bulk of the American people has turned against Bush so dramatically—among African-American voters, Bush's approval rating is literally *within the margin of error* and slowly but surely white America is catching on as well—has an effect on the content of Bush's State of the Union speeches. In the old days, he used them to try to sell his wares to the public: how if we didn't stop gays from getting married, civilization itself would crumble, how if we didn't send our children off to die in Iraq, Saddam Hussein would kill us in our beds, etc., etc., etc.

Now, he doesn't bother anymore.

Don't get me wrong: short of some dramatic changes (the sort this magazine exists to promote), El Presidente can continue to *do* what he likes for the rest of his term. His party runs the show in all three branches of government, and (as discussed above) the opposition party doesn't oppose much anyway. More importantly, there isn't (yet) the kind of serious and militant mass-based popular resistance that it would take to actually stop Bush & co. from doing what they like all around the world: dockworkers refusing to load shipments of weapons, soldiers refusing to go out on missions, that kind of thing.



Still, even if he can continue to enact his evil schemes, W. has stopped bothering to put much of an effort into selling them to a public that has long since stopped buying. Given that, he has in the last few years started an interesting trend: the increasingly prominent science-fiction elements in the State of the Union addresses.

In 2005, it was a plan to send people to Mars. (Of course, Bush's Great Manned Mars Trip isn't scheduled to go into effect until I'm an old man and W. has died of old age, but still...) This year, perhaps revealing something interesting about the President's television-viewing habits, it was a proposal to ban "human-

animal hybrids." (I'm not making that up. Look at the transcripts. He said it.)

Now, I don't want to give you the impression that I have a problem with this. I don't. If Bush wants to cast around desperately for a distraction to take people's minds off his long trail of crimes against humanity and attacks against the living standards of working people, then talking about Martians and hybrids is a lot more entertaining and less despicable than shifting the focus to the Dire Threat to Civilization Itself allegedly posed by gay marriage.

In fact, I have a modest suggestion. Assuming that Bush wants to continue this trend in 2007, I'd like to suggest a topic:

A constitutional amendment to ban time travel.

Think about it. While we're colonizing Mars and fighting off half-human hybrids, do we really want to risk mad scientists tampering with the fabric of reality? What if, for example, some one went back in time to assassinate Senator Prescott Bush before he could father Bush, Sr.? Worse yet, as dramatized in an episode of cartoon sitcom *Futurama* some one could go back in time and *become their own grandfather*. (That's got to be at least as grave a violation of God's law as gay marriage, right?)



As a concerned citizen, I'd like to see that addressed.

Alternately, back on Earth, maybe we could see to it that Bush doesn't *have* a 2007 State of the Union speech. Impeachment's in the air, and while, again, it's not enough—we need to abolish the system that produces W.'s—it might be a nice symbolic baby step towards a better and more advanced future society, the kind where thousands of people can't be sent to die to enrich the profit margins of a few.

The Martians would expect no less of us.



### **The Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice: Vital Force or Fading Ghost**

By Jim Griffin

[Jim Griffin is the Organizer of the Socialist Party of Michigan. He wants to note that, “The following is an opinion piece only. It is written from personal experience and represents personal impressions over a period of 1 1/2 years, and beyond. It is more than possible that others involved in the same events and developments may come away with different impressions and opinions.”]

The Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice (originally "... Against War In Iraq) has been around since the end of 2002/begining of 2003. It was organized as a response to the

buildup to the present Iraq War, but its members soon realized that it would have to take on a broader scope of issues in order to survive, especially since the movement against the Iraq War did not take off and become massive as they and many of the rest of us had hoped for and expected. So MECAWI became involved over time is supporting and sometimes even initiating actions and organizing efforts around a variety of peace and social justice issues. So far so good.

Attendance at MECAWI meetings and events waxed and waned over the months, as will the participation in any organization, and its main activists settled into the understanding that it was going to be a long haul, especially in relation to the war in Iraq. Unfortunately, SETTLED INTO became the operative phrase.

At a certain point, it became obvious that the Iraq War was losing popularity and support in the US populace at an accelerating and powerful rate. Anti-war organizations of military families blossomed, as did even organized opposition among Iraq War veterans themselves, and Gulf War veterans. All the opinion polls, even those that consistantly try to spin their questions so as to produce pro-war and pro-Bush responses, showed without a doubt this anti-war trend among broad layers of Americans. All this less than two years after the beginning of the war-- something that would have been a dream scenario for anti-war activists of the Vietnam War era.



One problem facing the anti Iraq War activists was and is that there is at this juncture no concentration of radicalizing students and youth, or workers, as there were in the 1960's and 1930's respectively. So the problem becomes: how do you build the anti-war movement into a mass movement, like during the 1960's ? Is it even possible to do so, and if it is, what sectors of the population do you concentrate your efforts on ? This set of questions was discussed and debated many times over a period of months within MECAWI, discussions which I personally initiated several times, including in personal, one-on-one conversations and e-mails.



The concept I presented was (1) that MECAWI should forge as close a working relationship of activism as possible with other anti-war and justice organizations and coalitions over a wide area within Detroit, Michigan in general, and within nearby states, (2) that MECAWI should reach out energetically to its own base of contacts and former active members so as to strengthen its core of activists, ready for work to build the movement, whether that means students or what have you, (3) that MECAWI should use all these forces to initiate a campaign to take the anti-war movement to the working class communities (and to ongoing working class/oppressed community struggles) in and around Detroit, to start with; communities that are predominantly African American and poor, (4) that in this way the anti-war movement could link up with struggles around other

issues affecting working class people and help to paint the picture of the interrelatedness of these issues with the war, and visa versa, (5) then, build and mobilize all these forces into a powerful multi-faceted movement that could educate and activate ever broader layers of the people to force a stop to the war, to prevent other imperial wars, and to fight for other gains as well, radicalizing masses of people along the way.

Sound reasonable ? Sound desirable ? Sound like something to get excited about and to get behind? You would think so, but the fact is that the key activists of MECAWI looked at me like I had just dropped in from Mars, especially the part, at first, where I suggested that we were lagging in efforts to activate the MECAWI base. They were more than satisfied to just go through the motions and to plan and carry out anti-war actions that were continual "business as usual" kinds of routine, ho hum marches down empty Woodward Avenue in downtown Detroit, starting from empty or nearly empty Jefferson Avenue to Central Methodist church at Adams/Grand Circus Park a mile or so North on Woodward, where plenty of "progressive" Democratic Party politicians would often be featured as speakers. Two or MAYBE three hundred "usual suspects" would participate from the peace and justice and "progressive" community, people who are always the ones to show up for such things -- people some of whom would be good as a beginning of an activist core to reach put to the broader, working class communities, but who by themselves represent nothing of consequence for a turnout. And turnout where ? Woodward Avenue, which a generation

ago was more thriving and populated, but which now is a ghost town ?

Time and again suggestions were made to hold and build for and publicize actions in different parts of Detroit where more people shopped and walked the streets and actually constituted a community. Or in nearby communities bordering Detroit where greater numbers could be possibly attracted. All to no avail. All falling on deaf ears. Falling on the deaf ears of aging, tired out, burned out, narrow beam "activists" who were more interested in justifying their own existence and conducting ritualized, carefully controlled exercises than in actually building a mass movement, or even trying to do so. More concerned with making themselves FEEL active than in really activating anything.

Each time that ideas for actions and organizing projects were put forward, certain MECAWI members would try to water them down and confine them to carefully controlled and limited parameters.

"Only this many flyers please; only try to cover a few blocks for the mobilization, not a wide area, thank you; only a couple of days of mobilization and flyer, not weeks before to break new ground; don't worry about reaching out to other groups and forces, we'll do fine enough with our usual bunch; we really only have a limited amount of time and energy; we're all tired and loaded down and can only do so much; better to stay with the tried and true" ... etc., etc. This was the set of attitudes expressed last Summer when the idea of community outreach was finally, after months of urging, taken up by MECAWI. The result was a pitiably

small turnout for two Saturdays of neighborhood flyer in a tiny area of Northwest Detroit, and almost no turnout at all for the supposed "community rally" on the third Saturday, July 30th. The idea has not been taken up again at all. So much for "community mobilization" MECAWI style.



The alarming thing, among other things, is that many, if not most, of these key "activists" are members or sympathizers of the Workers World Party, supposedly a revolutionary socialist organization that is very into building mass movements, or so they say. But many of them, in Detroit at least, are no longer acting very "revolutionary, if they ever really were. Encroaching age, long years of cushy jobs at high seniority status, middle class professional and academic positions, or stints at being lower level union bureaucrats/officers, have softened them. They no longer have the will or the imagination or the fire in their bellies to sincerely want to do what is necessary to work for the building of real mass movements. And so they go through the motions, pretending to do what in truth they will not do. The same pattern is repeated with them in the labor movement, such as with the pending and as yet stunted "struggle" of the Detroit city workers, within which WWP members and members of some other "socialist" groups, such as the so-called Revolutionary Workers League, hold positions as presidents, no less, of some



of the smaller city union locals. But bring up the idea of trying to call rank and file mass meetings and reaching out to the broader community for support, or making real preparations for militant strike action, and you're looked at again with the same "is this guy a Martian ?" kind of look.



MECAWI has become adept at tailing (copying) efforts initiated by others in other places, such as their "Camp Casey" replica they set up in downtown Detroit last Summer when Cindy Sheehan was conducting her heroic efforts in Crawford, Texas. MECAWI has done some good momentary outreach work, like at the Labor Day parade last September in Detroit, but there is never any follow up or organizing work to take advantage of contacts that they make, so it all goes for naught as far as actually building a movement is concerned.

Age, being tired out, and losing dynamism must never become an excuse or a cover for what can only be called laziness, sloth, and succumbing to demoralization and accomodation to the status quo. The desire, because of lack of energy and drive, to control and limit what is attempted so as to not lose organizational and political control, is understandable as a subconscious reactive impulse, but it is unforgiveable to not catch oneself at it or to refuse to listen and make changes when it is all pointed out clearly by others, time and again, in a supportive manner. If you're worn out and need a rest, take a rest, and come back later. But don't impose your

worn out and defeated state of mind on the work at hand, especially not by bureaucratic maneuvering, weak rationalizations, and trying to shape everything to suit your energy drain.

My guess is that MECAWI will fade and die sooner or later, unfortunately and very sadly. Or it will keep going on the surface, a body being artificially kept "alive" but in fact dead. It could be different, but I fear it will not. A new Detroit area anti-war and social justice network will have to be built, one firmly based as much as possible in the working class communities of color largely. It will have to link up in real, tangible, and ongoing ways with real life struggles for survival now emerging within the working class and oppressed communities so as to be relevant and so as to demonstrate how all the issues of the people are really one big struggle. This is the way to go, along with working with other anti-war groups, working on campuses, in high schools, in churches, with community organizations and labor struggles, etc. But it will not be done by or through the kind of flacid "leadership" that now dominates MECAWI.



One final note: Can you guess what MECAWI is planning for March 18th, the third anniversary of the beginning of the present war against Iraq ? You guessed it, a march down Woodward Avenue to Central Methodist church for a rally of the converted, the choir. They will then talk to each other and make each other feel morally cleansed. They will celebrate with (and for) various

Democratic Party mouthpieces as well, allowing the rally to be used as a campaign stop for these hacks and apologists.

Better is possible, and desperately needed.



### **Capitalism and Feminism**

By George Kropog

“A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle,” was a popular saying during the feminist movement of the 1960’s. During that same period Betty Friedan wrote “The Feminine Mystique” in which she asserted that women should actively enter the male-dominated workforce and act in the workplace not as honorary men but as women doing equal work for equal pay.

Flash ahead 40 years and what do we have? In the United States women only earn 68% of what a man does for the same job, if she can get a job that a man would normally occupy. The glass ceiling is alive and well and the best that most women can achieve are middle management positions, which are among the first to go during white-collar layoffs.



Also, there is something much more sinister happening. In better-off sections of the population, women are expected to work, not just to help pay the bills, but in order to raise the families’ financial status. A second car, a big fat mortgage and huge credit card debt are now the goal. Women’s liberation has become synonymous with conspicuous consumption.

“Modern” women play dual roles. They hold full-time jobs while bearing the brunt of families duties such as cooking, cleaning, shopping for food and child care. And what about child care? Maternity leave is too short and very rare. We now have an entire generation of children who started off in day care and then moved quickly on to latch-key programs after school.



Sixty-percent of the children in Detroit are eligible for Aid to Dependent Children. Single mothers scramble to put crumbs on the table while the fathers are nowhere to be found. Before school breakfast programs and after school activities have come and gone under a barrage of budget cuts and mismanagement. High school drop-out rates soar as does the cost of college tuition.

Scholarships are hard for young women to get as the rights given by “title 9” are largely un-enforced in our Universities.

The driving force behind the demise of the feminization of the workplace and equality for women is the Capitalist system. Under Capitalism, women are a cheap form of labor and their needs are easy to ignore. Once a woman enters the labor force, a complex system of credit and consumption kicks in that ensures that she will submit to the demands of her job. Under Capitalism, a woman's value—like a man's—is judged by her earning potential, labor profitability, and nothing else.

### **Support Democracy in Benton Harbor!**

[The following statement has been endorsed by dozens of individuals and organizations from around the country, including the Socialist Party of Michigan.]

A courageous community leader in Benton Harbor, Michigan, Rev. Edward Pinkney, is coming to trial on March 15th on trumped-up charges of voting fraud.



We call for these charges to be dropped, and we pledge our support to Rev. Pinkney and the community movement he has been leading for many years. Benton Harbor burst into the national news in June of 2003 when hundreds of unemployed African American young people rose up in anger after a 28 year old resident, Terrance Shurn, died as a

result of police action. This was only the latest of a plague of incidents of racial violence and police brutality over many years.

In 2004-2005 Rev. Pinkney and his organization, BANCO, exercised their democratic rights by working in a successful recall campaign against a person who did not represent the community's interests, a corrupt city commissioner backed by the Whirlpool Corporation, the largest employer in the area. Then, in an attempt to circumvent the will of the people, the vote was overturned by a local judge. In a further outrage, Rev. Pinkney was arrested on vote fraud charges. He faces a possible sentence of 20 years.



Whirlpool is actively working to build a golf course and expensive homes on Lake Michigan and turn Benton Harbor into an exclusive vacation area. This plan will displace senior citizens and others.

Small amounts of money, \$5, given to campaign workers for pro-recall work were alleged to be payoffs for a pro-recall vote. A government witness signed an affidavit that the recalled commissioner had paid him \$10 to say that Rev. Pinkney had paid him \$5. Another government witness was threatened with a prison sentence if she did not testify that Rev. Pinkney had paid people to vote; she had earlier signed an affidavit that she was paid to

pass out flyers and work the polls, nothing more.

Two key witnesses for the defense were recently arrested and imprisoned. Benton Harbor is a small town, 92% African American, where 1/3 of its households have annual income below \$8,000 and unemployment is at 65%. Rev. Pinkney and the Black Autonomy Network Community Organization that he heads have been working to bring jobs to the city. They deserve not repression but support.

We must stand with our leaders against those who trample on our rights in order to defend economic and racial injustice.

We pledge to do so in this immediate and urgent case and call for a dropping of all the charges!



*The Michigan Socialist* is the publication of the Socialist Party of Michigan, a state affiliate of the Socialist Party USA.

<http://www.spmichigan.org>

*Socialist Party of Michigan*

P.O. Box 3285

Kalamazoo, MI 49003-3285

*E-mail:* [spmi@spmichigan.org](mailto:spmi@spmichigan.org)

*Phone:* (269) 598-0534

The Socialist Party is a revolutionary democratic socialist and feminist party of the working class. We believe that true socialism is synonymous with radical democracy in all spheres of society and fight against all forms of oppression and exploitation.



You can submit articles for *The Michigan Socialist* to [BenBurgis@hotmail.com](mailto:BenBurgis@hotmail.com), either as MS Word documents or copied and pasted into the body of your e-mail.