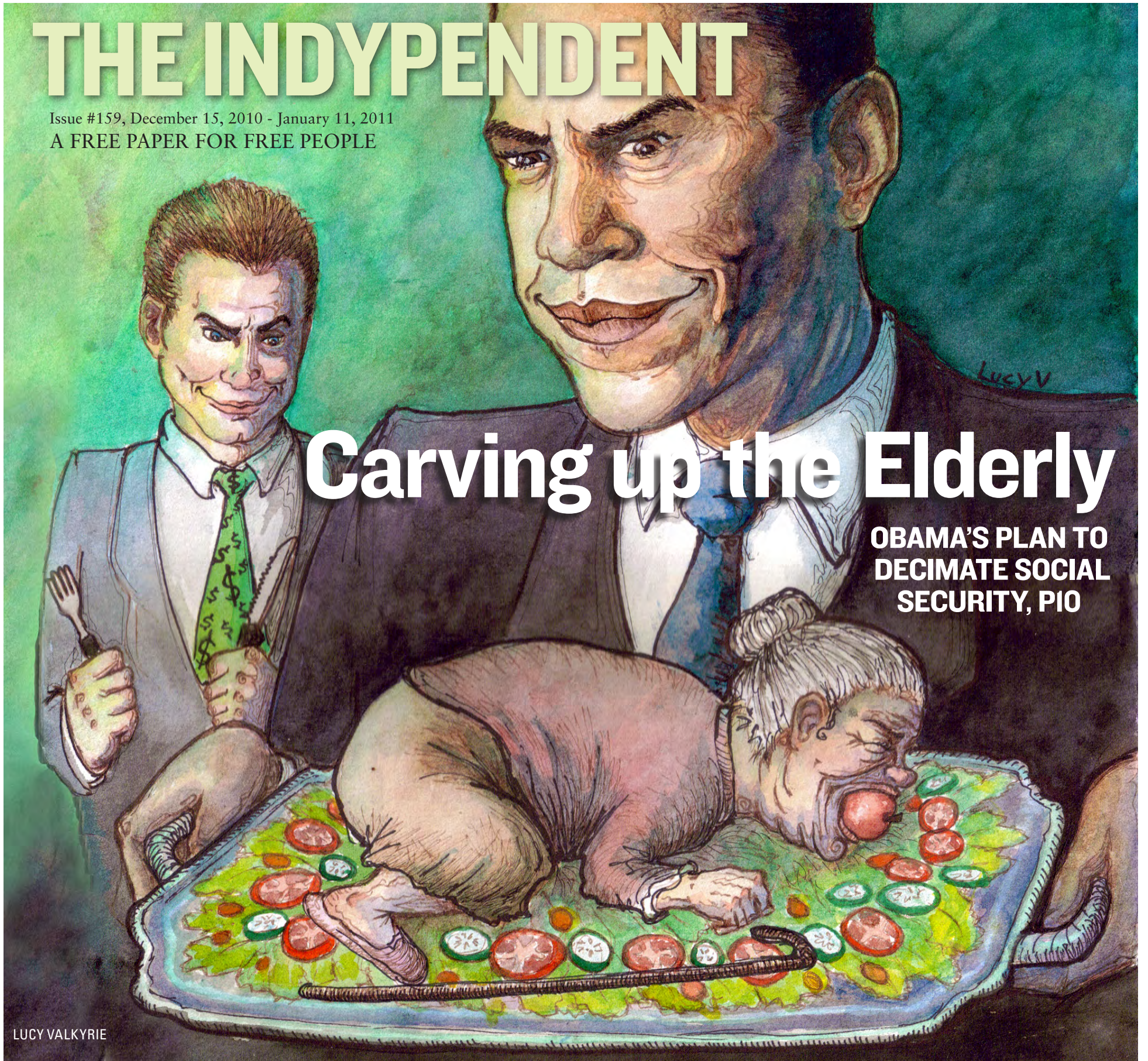


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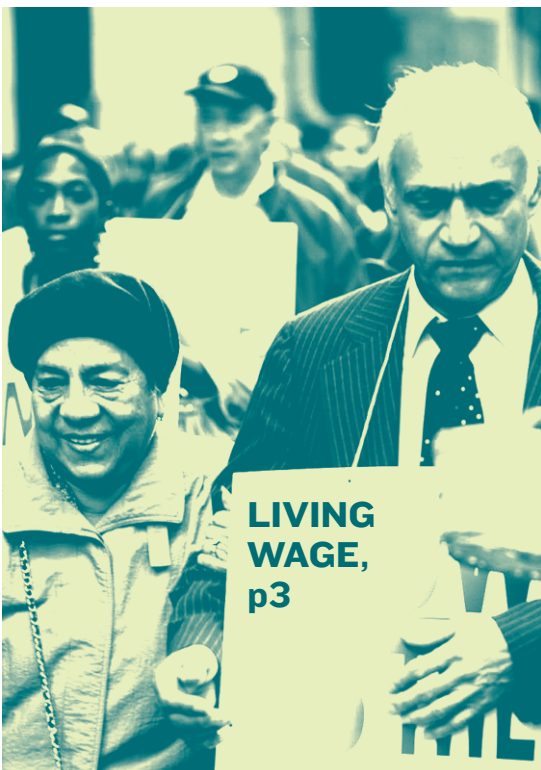
Issue #159, December 15, 2010 - January 11, 2011
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



Carving up the Elderly

OBAMA'S PLAN TO
DECIMATE SOCIAL
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LUCY VALKYRIE



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p11

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WED DEC. 8- MON FEB. 28

8pm • \$15-\$20

PLAY: KORACH: *THE BIBLICAL ANARCHIST*. Written and directed by Judith Malina, this play tells the story of Korach, who is described in the Bible as the leader of a rebellion against Moses during the Israelites' 40-year journey through the desert. Performances run from Wed.-Sat.

The Living Theatre, 21 Clinton St
212-352-0255 • livingtheatre.org

10pm • \$10-\$15

PERFORMANCE: THE FEAST. How do you want to ride out 2010? Brown Girls Burlesque (BGB) has a few tails to tell you a few tales! BGB is a collective of women of color dedicated to creating their own reflection in the art form of burlesque. Bring three cans of food to donate to NY Food Bank or \$10 admission. Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery
212-614-0505 • bowerypoetry.com

7pm • \$10-\$15

CONCERT: REVEREND BILLY'S "PEACE ON EARTH." Join Rev. Billy and the Life After Shopping Gospel Choir for their 10th annual feel-good-with-a-conscience Christmas show. This year's concert focuses on peace as the Afghanistan war becomes the United States' longest war. No one will be turned away for lack of funds. New York Society for Ethical Culture
2 W 64th St • 212-874-5210 • nysec.org

SUN DEC 19

4:30pm • Free

RIDE: LIGHTS IN THE HEIGHTS. Join Times Up! for a fun and leisurely ride to see the "miracle mile" of Christmas lights and decorations in Dyker Heights, Brooklyn. Riders will meet in Manhattan across from the bicycle entrance to the Manhattan Bridge.
times-up.org

MON DEC 20

7pm • Free

PARTY: DVD RELEASE. Come celebrate

the release of *After 'Change You Can Believe In,' Wally Shawn Reads From Essays and Discusses Human Nature With a Communist*, featuring Shawn and Andy Lee. A short excerpt from the film will be screened. Refreshments will be served. Revolution Books, 146 W 26th St
212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

TUE DEC 21

7pm • Free

DISCUSSION: WIKILEAKS REVELATIONS. Join Andy Lee and Carl Dix for a discussion of what's at stake in the struggle to stop the persecution of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange and the media. Revolution Books, 146 W 26th St
212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

THU DEC 23

7pm • \$8

EVENT: THE MOTH STORYSLAM! Come hear ten different stories at this month's StorySLAM!, which focuses on the theme of homecomings. Please arrive early, seating is limited.

Housing Works Bookstore Cafe
126 Crosby • 212-334-3324
housingworks.org

FRI DEC 31

8pm • \$25

PARTY: CELEBRATE CUBAN REVOLUTION. Join Casa de las Americas and the July 26 Coalition to ring in the New Year. The festivities include an appearance by the Cuban ambassador to the U.N., music by DJ Carlito and an exclusive raffle. \$25 donation includes food and a full bar.

Crystal Room at the Taino Towers
240 E 123th St • 212-348-5547
Franklin.Flores41@yahoo.com

TUE JAN 4

6pm • Free

ORIENTATION: MEDIA CLASSES. Brooklyn residents, come learn about upcoming classes at the Brooklyn Center for Media Education. Courses range from television production and video blogging to computer literacy.

reader comments

Post your own comments online at the end of each article or email letters@indypendent.org.

SET UP TO FAIL

Response to "School Closings Pushback Begins," Nov. 17:

I am a '74 graduate of Dewey High School. We had resource centers that were overstocked with books — now there is one cabinet, and it's locked. Setting a school up to fail, not supporting it and then claiming we have to close because of failure is Intellectual Fabrication and deceit of the highest order.

—BUNJI FROMARTZ

NO BORDERS & SECURITY

Responses to "Insecure Communities: Feds Target NYC Immigrants for More Deportations," Nov. 17:

If it is deplorable to deport an illegal alien, then why have that status at all? Maybe you should investigate what would happen with completely open borders. I'm pretty aware of the problems, I just haven't heard great solutions.

—POWEL6

This book appears to pose a false choice — that rioting is the only alternative to purely symbolic, theatrical protests. There are other forms of nonviolent direct action that can be very effective, such as strikes. However, these require serious, difficult organizing by people willing to go outside their activist-lifestyle subculture to try to unite with others.

—INK-STAINED WRETCH

whenever they meet to carve up the world. It's not the revolution but at least it put some real, visible and determined resistance up to those bastards. Respect is due.

—INTERNET RED

ROTHKO & AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE

Response to "Abstract Politicalism," Nov. 17:

Not one NYC critic seems to have any grasp of the historic and large role American Indian culture played in this movement. For example, new and well-documented evidence has been developed proving that Rothko was attending and sketching at American Indian ceremonies as early as 1938 and continued to do so as late as 1949.

—NOAH G. HOFFMAN
DIRECTOR, MARK ROTHKO
SOUTHWEST HISTORY
PROJECT / ROTHKO WITH
RESERVATIONS



I'm safer, now that my county participates in Secure Communities. This enables the federal government to make its rightful decision regarding someone's immigration status. I hope the entire state will soon be participating, for this improves safety and security for all of us.

—MAGYART

FROM 'DIFFICULT ORGANIZING' TO 'DETERMINED RESISTANCE'

Responses to "Reclaiming Violence," Nov. 17:

I've been in a black bloc or two... but it's every bit theatre. Violence per se isn't the issue. We can't understand the rise of "riot party" politics without looking at changes in policing models that essentially criminalized all major protests over a ten-year period. The way in which the debates framed the issue as "violence" always missed the point. Thanks to the black bloc for forcing the rulers of the world to hide behind walls of police and barricades

UPCOMING EVENTS

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718-683-5645 • bricartsmedia.org

SAT JAN 8

8pm • \$15 Suggested
PERFORMANCE: REGGIE HARRIS AND JON FROMER. Raised in the rich musical heritage of Philadelphia, Harris spices his folk and gospel style with elements of classical, rock, jazz and pop. Fromer's special blend of folk, blues and country has been at the center of peace movements in the San Francisco Bay Area for decades, where he is

TUE JAN 18 • 7:30 PM

DISCUSSION: GLOBAL CAPITALISM, A MONTHLY UPDATE WITH RICK WOLFF. Join Professor Wolff for an analysis of the major economic events of the last month and their contexts within the longer-term economic trends shaping politics and society in the United States and abroad. We will focus on the evolving global capitalist economic crisis and its consequences. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

THU FEB 3 • 6-8PM

CLASS: READING MARX'S *CAPITAL*, VOLUME II. This semester-long class, taught by Professor David Harvey, will focus on a close reading of the text of Volume II and some of Volume III of Marx's *Capital*. A limited number of seats are available for Brecht Forum subscribers. Special location: Union Theological Seminary, 3041 Broadway at 121st St.

Living Wage Battle Spreads Across City



BY DIANE KRAUTHAMER

The Queens Center Mall in Elmhurst received \$48 million in city tax breaks from 2004 to 2009 and is rated as one of the 10 most profitable malls in the country. It's bustling with activity again this holiday season, yet most of the 3,100 workers in the mall's 70 stores earn at or near the minimum wage.

"The amount I'm making is not enough to support my family," said Larry, a 48-year-old father who works as a full-time sales associate at a JC Penney store in the mall, earning \$8.96 an hour after his healthcare costs are deducted. Larry, who asked that his real name not be used, has been working at JC Penney for six years and lives in a small apartment in Lefrak City, Queens. His earnings support his wife, who is unable to find work, and his 8-year-old child. "I have to pay for their basic needs, like food and rent, and it's always a struggle."

Workers like Larry may not have to worry much longer. Labor, community and religious groups from all five boroughs have formed Living Wage NYC, a coalition to achieve living wages for workers whose jobs are created through economic development subsidies — tax breaks and other forms of city assistance that supports development projects similar to the Queens Center Mall. Implementing higher wage standards in subsidized developments will have a significant impact on retail and food workers throughout New York.

Leading members of this coalition include the Retail,

Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NW-BCC), and the Micah Institute at New York Theological Seminary.

STRAIGHT FROM THE BRONX

The coalition emerged from a hard-fought battle against the Bloomberg administration's plan to convert the Kingsbridge Armory, a hulking 575,000-square-foot structure in the northwest Bronx, into a poverty-wage shopping mall. The project's lead developer, the Related Companies, was slated to receive more than \$60 million in taxpayer subsidies for the \$310 million project.

In December 2009, the City Council voted 45-to-1 to reject the planned redevelopment of the Armory after Mayor Michael Bloomberg refused to allow Related to negotiate with community and labor leaders over the terms of a Community Benefits Agreement, which included living wage jobs, local hiring, community and recreation space, money for affordable housing, the exclusion of a big box grocery store, and the protection of the right of retail workers to join a union without intimidation.

This in turn catalyzed a citywide movement for living wage jobs at city-subsidized developments. With momentum from the struggle in the Bronx, Council Members Oliver Koppell (D-WFP-Kingsbridge) and Annabel Palma (D-WFP-Parkchester) introduced the Fair Wages for New

Continued on page 4

SUPPORTING LABOR: Living wage backers march on City Hall Nov. 17 in a show of support for a proposed ordinance before City Council that would boost the wages of workers at projects that have received more than \$100,000 in public subsidies. PHOTO: CHARLES FOSTROM/LIVING WAGE NYC

FIGHTING FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES



(Left) Higher Education Committee Chair Ydanis Rodriguez (D-WFP-Washington Heights) speaks at a Dec. 8 rally on the steps of City Hall. Faculty, students and staff from the City University of New York (CUNY) were protesting Mayor Bloomberg's mid-year budget cut of \$13 million to CUNY's six community colleges. The schools serve more than 80,000 students, 75 percent of whom come from households earning less than \$40,000 per year. CUNY supporters worry cuts will lead to further increases in class sizes, shrinking student services and layoffs of part-time instructors. Standing next to Rodriguez are City Council members Charles Barron (left, D-FP-East New York) and Jumaane Williams (right, D-WFP-East Flatbush). All three are graduates of the CUNY system.

PHOTO: DAVE SANDERS

(Right) Also on Dec. 8, parents and employees of the city's day-care system marched from Bowling Green to City Hall to speak out against the Bloomberg administration's plan to close 16 day-care centers and eliminate 3,650 slots for toddlers despite receiving \$29 million in federal stimulus money to keep the centers open. "This administration ignores the pleas of working families and slashes programs with no regard for its effect on the budgets of parents or community stability," said Mabel Everett, president of Local 205 District Council 1707, which represents 6,000 day-care workers in more than 350 centers throughout the city. PHOTO: ANDREW HINDERAKER



Religious Groups Mobilize for Living Wage

Continued from page 3

WFP-Parkchester) introduced the Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act in May and a majority of City Council members now supports the proposed ordinance. The measure would require all projects that receive more than \$100,000 in city support to provide jobs that pay at least \$10 per hour plus healthcare benefits or \$11.50 per hour without benefits.

“With our tax dollars, this city is funding these mega-developments that are attacking our communities. They’re displacing us and they’re keeping us poor,” said Maisha Morales of Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), a Living Wage NYC coalition member. “It’s only fair that these developers pay living wages.”

BLOOMBERG SEES RED

Since 1999, the city has provided upwards of \$1 billion in tax breaks and subsidies to shopping centers, sports stadiums and office buildings (see sidebar) that are not required to provide living wages to the service workers who labor in them. And Mayor Bloomberg appears to like it that way. In fact, the mayor, whose fortune climbed to \$18 billion last year, argues that establishing a living wage is tantamount to communism.

“I’ve always wanted to let the marketplace set the wages,” he told the *New York Daily News* in September. “Government should not be in the business of doing that. The last government that tried that doesn’t exist anymore. That was the Soviet Union.”

The Bloomberg administration has responded to the living wage campaign by allocating \$1 million for a study of the proposed ordinance headed by a pair of economists, David Neumark and Daniel Hamermesh, who are among the nation’s most vociferous critics of living wage laws. The Bloomberg administration continues to ignore evidence including studies by the Brennan Center for Justice and the Center for American Progress (CAP) showing that cities have successfully incorporated living wage standards into economic development projects without harming job growth. The CAP study covered cities as large as Los Angeles and as small as Duluth, Minnesota.

“Higher wages leads to more spending in the local economy, more tax dollars for the city, and fewer costs associated with providing public assistance,” said John Petro, an urban policy analyst at the Drum Major Institute for

Public Policy. “Creating low-wage jobs, on the other hand, does nothing to move families out of poverty and off public assistance.”

PREACHING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Scores of local religious leaders are countering Bloomberg’s Scrooge-like message this holiday season.

On the weekend of Oct. 10, congregants at more than 80 houses of worship across the city heard pro-living wage messages during services and were asked to sign cards urging their Councilmembers to sign onto the bill. On Nov. 17, clergy led a silent procession to City Hall to deliver thousands of cards expressing support for the living wage ordinance.

“Wages are like education: when you don’t have enough of it, the community is destroyed,” said Rev. Dr. Robert M. Waterman of the Antioch Baptist Church of Brooklyn, and one of the faith leaders in the Living Wage NYC coalition. “Passing this living wage legislation is important to everybody and would raise the wage standards for all of our communities,” he added.

Twenty-eight out of 51 City Council members now support the bill and coalition members are working to gain a veto-proof majority of 34 supporters. They will also need to win over Council Speaker Christine Quinn who controls whether the proposed ordinance ultimately comes to a vote. Quinn has remained non-committal to date.

Living wage supporters will continue mobilizing in 2011 starting with a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event at Convent Baptist Church in Harlem on Jan. 13. The event will honor Dr. King’s legacy as a leader in the struggle for living wages for sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968.

For workers like Larry who have worked in retail for years and can barely provide basic necessities for themselves and their kids, a living wage job would make all the difference in the world.

“If my co-workers and I had a good job with benefits, we would be able to pay our bills, pay rent and put food on the table for our families,” said Larry. “If everyone in New York could make at least \$10 per hour, it would make a huge difference for all of us.”

Diane Krauthamer is a communications assistant at the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.



FAITH BASED INITIATIVE: Rev. Ruby Wilson of Safe Haven United Church of Christ in Ridgewood, Queens, preaches to congregants on the importance of living wages during a service on Oct. 10. That weekend, congregants at more than 80 churches, synagogues and mosques across the city heard pro-living wage messages. PHOTO: CHARLES FOSTROM/LIVING WAGE NYC

Some people benefit more than others from the city’s economic development subsidies:

SUBSIDIZING POVERTY WAGES

YANKEE STADIUM

Opened in 2009, this \$2.3 billion baseball palace is the most expensive sports stadium in the United States and has received \$1.2 billion in city, state and federal tax subsidies. The Yankees will also save hundreds of millions of dollars in the future thanks to a friendly tax loophole that exempts the team from ever having to pay property taxes on the site. The stadium’s 4,400 mostly seasonal employees make an average of \$9 an hour.

BRONX GATEWAY MALL

Located 10 blocks south of Yankee Stadium at the former Bronx Terminal Market, this mall has received more than \$10 million in subsidies. Roughly 1,300 workers are employed at stores such as Target, Home Depot, BJ’s, Best Buy, Bed Bath and Beyond, and the like. The average starting wage is estimated to be \$8.80 an hour.

FRESH DIRECT WAREHOUSE

Low wages go with the low temperatures at the online grocer’s distribution hub in Long Island City. While Fresh Direct has received \$2.8 million in income and property tax breaks from the city over the past decade and is slated to receive \$12 million more, most of its more than 1,600 employees earn less than \$25,000 per year. More than 75 percent of these workers start at minimum wage. Fresh Direct has also been heavily criticized for using hardball tactics to prevent its workers from unionizing.

—D.K.

Sources: *fieldofschemes.com, NY Daily News, Drum Major Institute, National Employment Law Project, Fiscal Policy Institute, Good Jobs New York and the NYC Economic Development Corporation.*

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130 St. Mark’s Place
- Mercer St. Books
206 Mercer St.
- New York Public Library
Jefferson Market Branch
Sixth Ave. & 9th St.
- Brecht Forum
451 West St.

4th Street Food Co-op

- 58 E. 4th St
- Theater for the New City
155 First Ave.

14TH TO 96TH ST.

- Jefferson Market Library
6th Ave & 10th St.
- Chelsea Square
Restaurant
23rd St. & 9th Ave
- Manhattan Neighborhood
Network
537 W. 59th St.
- New York Public Library
Muhlenberg Branch
209 W. 23rd St.
- St. Agnes Branch Library
444 Amsterdam Ave
(btwn 81st and 82nd)

ABOVE 96TH ST.

- New York Public Library
George Bruce Branch
518 W. 125th St.
- Book Culture
526 W. 112th St.
- New York Public Library
Harlem Branch
9 W. 124th St.
- New York Public Library
Hamilton Grange Branch
503 W. 145th St.
- Uptown Sister’s Books
156 St. & Amsterdam
- Bloomingdale
Branch Library
150 W. 100th St.
- Hue-man Books
124th St. & Frederick
Douglass Blvd.

BROOKLYN

- Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Pkwy.
- BAM
30 Lafayette Ave.
- Tillie’s of Brooklyn
248 DeKalb Ave.
- Tea Lounge
Union St. & Seventh Ave.
- Video Gallery
310 Seventh Ave.
- Ozzie’s Coffee Shop
249 5th Ave. &
57 Seventh Ave.
- Verb Café
Bedford Ave. &
N. 5th St.
- Videology
308 Bedford Ave.

Pillow Café

- 505 Myrtle Ave.
- Sisters Community
Hardware
900 Fulton St.
- Brooklyn Public Library
Pacific Street Branch
25 Fourth Ave.
- K-Dog & Dune Buggy
43 Lincoln Rd.
- Outpost Café
1014 Fulton St.
- Blackbird Café
197 Bedford Ave.
- ’sNice Café
315 Fifth Ave.
- Purity Diner
43 Underhill Ave.

Brooklyn Public Library Bedford Branch

- 496 Franklin St.

BRONX

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Branch Library
E. 140th St &
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- High Bridge Branch
Library
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- Brook Park
141st St. & Brook Ave.

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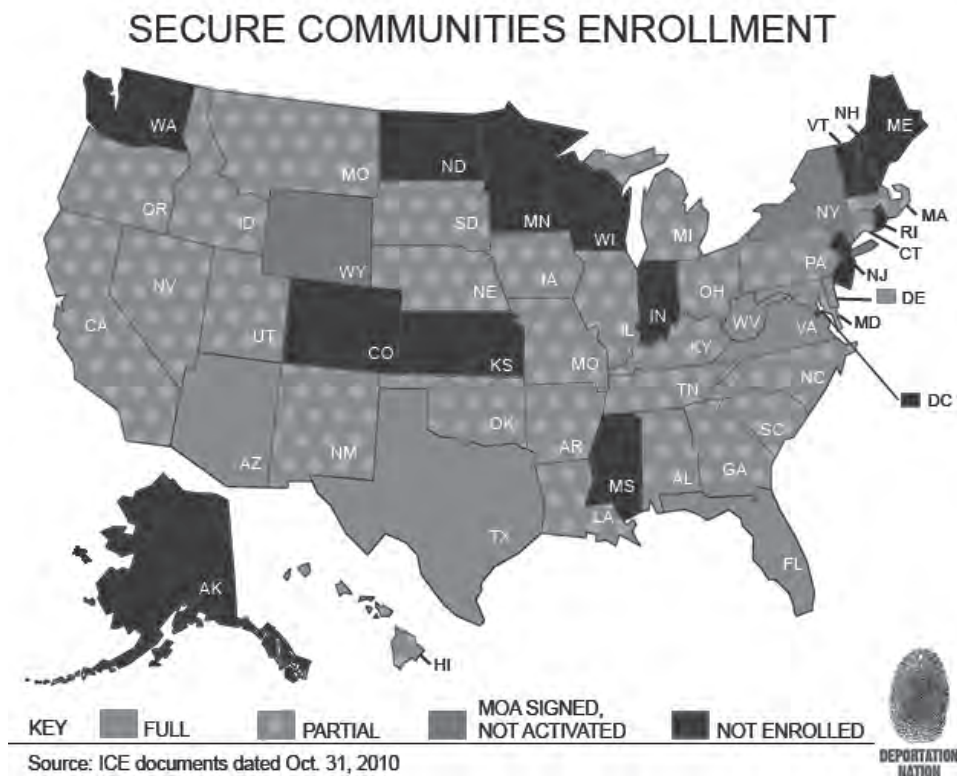
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Feds on ICE

JUDGE ORDERS GOV'T TO RELEASE SECURE COMMUNITIES DOCUMENTS



BY RENÉE FELTZ

Is it possible to opt-out of the controversial Secure Communities program that shares local arrest data with immigration agents?

The public may know as soon as January whether the program is mandatory or voluntary.

On Dec. 9 lawyers for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) tried to argue before Judge Shira Scheindlin in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York that they needed more time to respond to an emergency injunction to release opt-out related documents. But she was out of patience.

"I'm somewhat confused. The defense agreed to do this back in July and here we are in December," said Judge Scheindlin. "I think the government is dragging its feet."

Since ICE failed to meet its previous deadline, the judge set Jan. 17, 2011 as the new date for ICE to release the documents or explain why they must be withheld. Lawyers who made the request will have two weeks to comply, and then ICE will have one more week to answer.

"This is serious," said Judge Schiendlin.

Almost everything known about Secure Communities has been released by ICE as a result of the ongoing records request made in February on behalf of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON). The attorneys representing the group are from the Center for Constitutional Rights and the Immigration Justice Clinic of the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law.

The program has a mandate to target "criminal aliens" who are a threat to public safety. But documents released so far show most of those deported are charged with low-level offenses, some as minor as traffic infractions. About a quarter are innocent and just have a civil immigration violation.

Fourteen states were enrolled in Secure Communities when the request was submit-

ted. The total has since grown to include 35 states. ICE wants to expand the program nationwide by 2013 and has forced counties to participate against their will.

When NDLON organizer, Sarahi Uribe, took the stand during the Dec. 9 hearing she said counties and states wishing to resist the program would face irreparable harm if ICE did not release information about how to opt-out.

"We're in the thick of it," said Uribe. "We're trying to figure out our next steps, but we don't have the information we need."

ICE released a small portion of the records requested on Aug. 2, 2010. ICE attorneys estimate they have responded to 30 percent of the requests.

"As far as I understand it, there has been little or no compliance," said Judge Schiendlin.

ICE lawyers said they have identified about 15,000 opt-out related documents so far, and argued they needed time to sift through them to determine what could be released.

But the judge dismissed this request, saying she was familiar with records requests and knew this amount could be handled promptly.

"15,000 is a tiny set of documents," said Judge Schiendlin. "It could be searched by the end of the week with the proper technology."

She also refused to let the government set the stop date for its document search at the time when the original records request was made. She ordered that Oct. 13, 2010 be the cut-off date.

"I don't think the government should be rewarded for its own delay," said Judge Schiendlin.

She set a date of Feb. 25, 2011 as the deadline for ICE to release a second set of documents related to other topics in the records request, and noted several times that if ICE fails to produce documents in the two upcoming hearings they will face possible contempt sanctions.

This article was originally published on DeportationNation.org.

NOW IS THE TIME

to make an adequate income a reality for all God's Children. Now is the time for City Hall to take a position for that which is just and honest.

-Martin Luther King Jr., 1968



Mass Meeting for Living Wages Thursday, January 13th, 6:30 PM

**Convent Avenue Baptist Church,
420 W. 145th St (@ Convent Avenue)**
1, A, C, B, D, to 145th St.

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9am, Mon-Fri

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9am, Tues & Thurs

SATELLITE TV
Free Speech TV
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HOST, DEMOCRACY NOW!

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NYC SCHOOLS

EXPERIENCE BE DAMNED!

Ed Department's self-inflicted crisis leaves more than 1,000 veteran teachers in limbo

BY MARC EPSTEIN

When there is evidence of bad public policy, you can safely assume that it took two parties working collaboratively to create the swamp.

New York City's Department of Education and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) have found themselves mired in a dispute over the fates of more than a thousand teachers, many of whom have no assigned teaching position, but continue to collect full-time salaries. This group of teachers is collectively referred to as ATRs, or the absent teacher reserve. Large numbers of ATRs are not instructing students in their licensed areas. Instead they often find themselves working as substitute teachers.

At various times these teachers have been labeled by outgoing Schools Chancellor Joel Klein as incompetent or too lazy to seek positions. He wants to fire them. To judge from his statements and newspaper editorials, we are simply facing a case of old-time union featherbedding.

If the problem isn't resolved, incoming Schools Chancellor Cathie Black will inherit this mess just as yet another round of dozens of school closings is slated to be carried out. All her public statements to date indicate that she has bought Klein's narrative hook, line and sinker.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS

The primary reason so many teachers are out of a job stems from Klein's policy of closing large high schools with more programs, declaring them “failed” enterprises and replacing them with small high schools. Since the closing is a “hostile” takeover, the teachers too are “failed” and sent packing, rather than placed in the new small schools.

If you are in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can lose your position whether you are a new hire or a 20-year veteran. When you impose this method of staffing on the largest school system in the country, something has got to give. In fact, it's only logical that a number of teachers would find themselves inhabiting the limbo world of the “ATR.”

This limbo world can find a music teacher covering classes for an absent social studies teacher, while his music program is assigned to a social studies teacher. I know because this is precisely what occurred in my school.

The sooner the myths about public school staffing are dispensed with the better the public interest will be served, because this is Klein's self-created crisis. Tenure for public school teachers is not a lifetime sinecure. In most respects it is no different from civil service protections for police, fire and sanitation workers. You have to have due process in order to fire an employee.

PERVERSE INCENTIVES

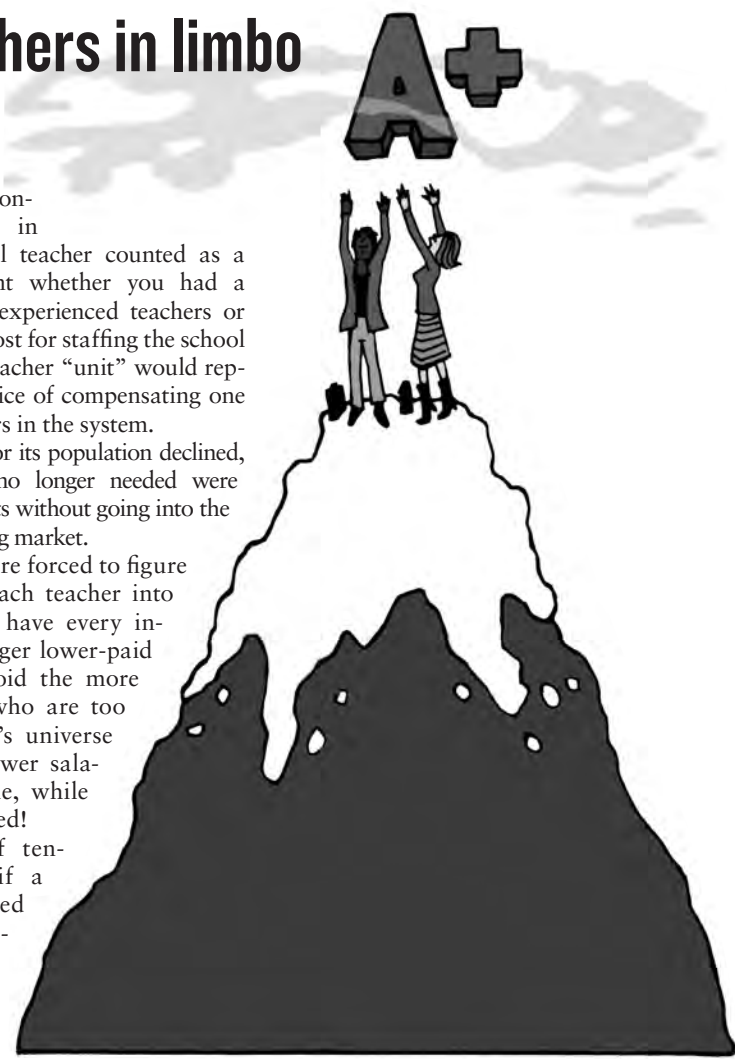
So, why should an experienced teacher have a tough time landing a new position, you might ask? Well, along with the downsizing of schools came Klein's decision to budget schools according to the actual salaries of their teachers.

Before mayoral control was instituted in 2002, a high school teacher counted as a “unit,” which meant whether you had a school with lots of experienced teachers or mostly rookies, the cost for staffing the school was the same. The teacher “unit” would represent the average price of compensating one of the 80,000 teachers in the system.

If a school closed, or its population declined, teachers who were no longer needed were placed in available slots without going into the so-called “open” hiring market.

When principals are forced to figure the real salary of each teacher into their budgets, they have every incentive to hire younger lower-paid teachers and to avoid the more experienced ones, who are too expensive. In Klein's universe inexperience and lower salaries become a virtue, while experience be damned!

Would critics of tenure suggest that if a firehouse is closed because of a reorganization move by the department, the firemen are responsible



JULIE LAQUER

Principals now have every incentive to hire lower-paid and less experienced teachers.

for finding a new job within the system? Would these critics claim that young inexperienced firefighters are preferable to experienced ones?

With the press providing the wind for his sails and Bill Gates funding the small-school voyage, Klein launched an assault on teachers and large high schools with great zeal. Ask yourself which role is easier, playing Tom Silva on *This Old House*, or just taking a wrecking ball to the whole place?

THE TEACHERS UNION

Around now, you might be asking yourself, why did the teachers union acquiesce to the ATR? To say that the UFT has taken a pounding in the press and from the chancellor over the past seven years is an understatement.

In typical New York fashion, the UFT stood by when a good policy, the School Based Option Staffing and Transfer Plan (SBO), was being strangled and agreed to the ATR pool.

The SBO had a cooperative team of teachers and administrators select new faculty members collegially. If someone with loads of seniority applied for a job and had nothing else going for them except time in the system, they could be rejected.

The SBO was already in place and had been spreading throughout the system when Bloomberg took over the schools. So Klein's claim that he was being strangled by union

seniority rules was simply a myth.

If the union were as omnipotent as the editorialists claim, why didn't it block or wage a PR campaign against this new fatally flawed hiring process and fight for the SBO?

There's no way to divine the answer to that question. In all likelihood the UFT knows that no matter how much ink is spent reviling them; no arbitrator would overturn the civil service laws and allow unassigned teachers with satisfactory performance records to be fired.

Yet the public discourse is diminished by the union's failure to make its case for the rank-and-file teacher to the public.

In the end, the DOE and the union have been too clever by half. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted. The hiring process hasn't been improved, and teachers who remain the vital component in the education process are further diminished.

If this self-inflicted “crisis” were given to a business management class as a case study, it's likely that they would conclude that the negotiators on both sides of the table were idiots.

Marc Epstein teaches history at Jamaica High School in Queens. A longer version of this article originally appeared on *The Huffington Post*.



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Wiki Lockdown

FROM THOMAS JEFFERSON TO JULIAN ASSANGE

BY ROBERT SCHEER

All you need to know about Julian Assange's value as a crusading journalist is that *The New York Times* and most of the world's other leading newspapers have led daily with stories based on his WikiLeaks releases. All you need to know about the collapse of traditional support for the constitutional protection of a free press is that Dianne Feinstein, the centrist Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, has called for Assange "to be vigorously prosecuted for espionage."

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, Feinstein, who strongly supported the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, has the audacity to call for the imprisonment of the man who, more than any other individual, has allowed the public to learn the truth about those disastrous imperial adventures — facts long known to Feinstein as head of the Intelligence Committee but never shared with the public she claims to represent.

Feinstein represents precisely the government that Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he said, in defense of unfettered freedom of the press, "[W]ere it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

In the 1787 letter in which he wrote those words, Jefferson was reflecting the deep wisdom of a political leader who often had been

excoriated by a vicious press that would make the anarchist-inflected comments of Assange seem mild in comparison. More than 35 years later, after having suffered many more vitriolic press attacks, Jefferson reiterated his belief in a free press, in all its vagaries, as the foundation of a democracy. In an 1823 letter to Lafayette, Jefferson warned: "The only security of all is in a free press. The force of public opinion cannot be resisted when permitted to be freely expressed. The agitation it produces must be submitted to. It is necessary, to keep the waters pure."

INCONVENIENT TRUTHS

It is precisely that agitation that so alarms Feinstein, for the inconvenient truths she has concealed in her Senate role would have indeed shocked many of those who voted for her. She knew in real time that Iraq had nothing to do with the 9/11 attack, yet she voted to send young Americans to kill and be killed based on what she knew to be lies. It is her duplicity, along with the leaders of

to discredit and destroy Assange, who dared let the public in on the depths of official deceit — a deceit that they hide behind in making their claims of protecting national security. Claims mocked by released cables that show that our puppets in Iraq and Afghanistan are deeply corrupt and anti-democratic, and that Al Qaeda continues to find its base of support not in those countries but rather in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

It is unconscionable to target Assange for publishing documents on the internet that mainstream media outlets have attested had legitimate news value. As in the historic case in which Daniel Ellsberg gave *The New York Times* the Pentagon Papers exposé of the official lies justifying the Vietnam War, Assange is acting as the reporter here, and thus his activities must be shielded by the First Amendment's guarantee of journalistic freedom.

It is outrageous for any journalist, or respector of what every American president has claimed is our inalienable, God-given right to a free press, not to join in Assange's defense on this issue, as distinct from what increasingly appear to be trumped-up charges that led to his recent voluntary ar-



Julian Assange's work is essential to the functioning of a free press. PHOTO: ESTHER DYSON/FLICKR

rest in London in a case involving his personal behavior. Abandon Assange and you abandon the bedrock of our republic: the public's right to know.

Robert Scheer is the author of nine books including The Pornography of Power: How Defense Hawks Hijacked 9/11 and Weakened America. A longer version of this article originally appeared on Truthdig.com.

MIRRORING THE TRUTH
 As *The Independent* goes to press, more than 1,800 websites around the world are mirroring WikiLeaks. For a full listing, see wikileaks.ch/mirrors.html. For more on the case of U.S. Army Private Bradley Manning, who is accused of providing hundreds of thousands of government documents to Wikileaks, see couragetoresist.org.

both political parties, that now stands exposed by the WikiLeaks documents.

That is why U.S. governmental leaders will now employ the massive power of the state

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BACK TO REAGANOMICS

BY ERIC LAURSEN

The press section was full when two far-right Republican senators, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma and Mike Crapo of Idaho, took over a room on Capitol Hill on Dec. 2 to announce how they would vote as members of President Obama's deficit commission. But instead of offering their views on deficit reduction — the ostensible goal of the National Commission on Fiscal Reform — Coburn and Crapo wanted to talk about tax reform.

What they especially liked about the proposal was that the vast majority of its deficit cuts came from reducing spending, not raising taxes. In fact, it would slash tax rates for every level of income.

"We're at about 92 percent tax reduction versus tax increase," said Coburn. "If you score that dynamically, we're gonna get more tax reduction than tax increase." He then bestowed his highest possible compliment on the proposal.

"This tax plan," Coburn said, "is Reagan on steroids."

Coburn and Crapo would vote yes.

Two separate but related forces — one, a perceived fiscal crisis that threatens to drastically raise the national debt over the next decade; the other, the extension of the 2001 Bush tax cuts — are together threatening massive changes in tax policy. These could lock in a dangerous new economic direction for the United States for the next generation at least. In addition, President Obama's recent tax cut agreement with congressional Republicans includes a provision that could fatally damage Social Security in the decades to come.

Americans in the middle- or lower-income levels should be afraid — very afraid.

A DECLINING STANDARD OF LIVING

Two years after the real estate bubble collapsed, the United States remains mired in a recession. Home foreclosures continue, unemployment remains near 10 percent, and the economy is not recovering quickly enough to bring this figure down. The last time it got this bad, in the 1930s, Washington launched a host of programs to create jobs, revive demand for goods and services, and get the economy moving again. It wasn't perfect, but it cut unemployment in half and arguably saved the capitalist system from itself.

This time, however, an influential group of economists, policy wonks, and conservative lawmakers, many with strong connections to Wall Street, have kept Washington's attention focused almost entirely on the federal budget deficit and the national debt. In their version of reality, the only acceptable economic stimulus during a recession is tax cuts, preferably for owners of capital. The

deficit commission's recommendations reflect this philosophy. For the most part, so does the package of tax cuts and benefits extensions that the White House recently worked out with congressional Republicans.

If these changes go through, the likely result will be far lower taxes for corporations and the wealthy; severe cuts in Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and just about every other important domestic program; and elimination, or at least drastic reduction, of a host of less known tax credits that help working households keep their heads above water. In short, a serious decline in living standards for all but the richest Americans.

"Reagan on steroids," or "Reaganomics II," just about describes it.

Reaganomics, of course, was the set of policies adopted in the early 1980s when the administration pushed through Congress a drastic set of tax cuts for the affluent that were supposed to spur them to invest, creating jobs and generating explosive economic growth. An uneasy alliance of deficit hawks and free-market conservatives pushed the cuts through.

Since then — and particularly during the George W. Bush administration — the free-market conservatives and deficit hawks have formed a kind of tax-and-budgetary tag team in Washington. One pushes through more and bigger tax cuts and tax breaks for the affluent; the other insists on keeping spending low or even cutting it for programs that help working people — necessitated by, among other things, the lost revenues lost from the tax cuts. The combination has led to a vast shift in taxation: Corporations and high-net-worth individuals pay a smaller proportion of their income in taxes, while the middle class and all but the lowest-income households pay relatively more.

The report issued by Obama's deficit commission, coupled with the deal the administration and congressional Republicans are now trying to nail down to extend the Bush tax cuts, could make the next 12 months the biggest yet for these two Washington factions.

TAX CUTS FOR THE RICH

The deficit commission's report — actually, it failed to get the 14 votes needed to be sent to Congress for a vote, so it's really just the report of the co-chairs, Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson — calls for close to \$4 trillion in deficit reduction. Three-quarters of this would take the form of drastic spending cuts and elimination of a host of "tax expenditures." Many of these benefit working people, including the earned income tax credit for low-income households and deductions for employers who offer healthcare plans to their workers. Medicare premiums would be hiked and Social Security would adopt a less-generous inflation adjustment

formula, lowering benefits for both current and future retirees.

But the centerpiece of the plan, hailed by the Washington policy elite when it was announced as a courageous attempt to focus politics on deficit reduction, is actually a package of tax cuts. Bowles and Simpson propose to lower the top tax rate for individuals from 35 percent to 28 percent, while those making up to \$210,000 would see their top rate drop from 28 percent to 22 percent. Corporate taxes would drop, too, from 35 percent to 28 percent, and companies would no longer pay taxes on foreign profits when they brought them back into the country.

Bowles and Simpson say this generosity

will "make the United States the best place for starting and building businesses" and help U.S. companies compete overseas.

Less than a week later, the White House announced a deal that seemed to go in the opposite direction. The handshake agreement with Republican leaders calls for spending some \$900 billion over the next two years, none of it offset by spending cuts or increases in other taxes — meaning it would add to the deficit. Instead, Obama and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell packaged it as a way to stimulate the flagging economy.

Assuming it survives a wave of anger from congressional Democrats, the deal between Obama and McConnell will extend the Bush

Obama's tax cut agreement with congressional Republicans includes a provision that could fatally damage Social Security.



LUCY VALKYRIE

WHAT DEFICIT REDUCTION AND TAX REFORM REALLY MEAN FOR WORKING AMERICANS.

tax cuts for another two years. That's long enough, the Republicans hope, for them to put one of their own in the White House and pass a bill to make the cuts, which overwhelmingly benefit the most affluent Americans, permanent. It would also keep the tax rate for capital gains and dividends, which is how the rich receive most of their income, at a maximum of 15 percent — less than half the top income tax rate — for two more years. And it would bring back the estate tax — but at a much lower level than Democrats had sought.

To balance this — sort of — the agreement calls for extending unemployment benefits another 13 months, which means that the Democrats will have to push for another extension at the end of next year, when they're getting ready for another election and again vulnerable to being held up by the Republican leadership to get it. It would extend the child tax credit, increase the earned income tax credit and create a new tax credit to help cover college tuition. These are the best things in the bill for working people.

REDUCING THE PAYROLL TAX

The deal would also provide a one-year, 2 percent reduction in the payroll tax, which funds Social Security. This is meant to put money in people's pockets and stimulate the economy to the tune of \$120 billion. But this temporary reduction would replace the Making Work Pay tax credit in the stimulus package Obama pushed through Congress last year. Making Work Pay was targeted to help middle- and lower-income workers; the payroll tax credit would provide much bigger savings to high earners, who are less likely to spend it.

What we have, then, is a tentative deal between the president and the Republican leadership that moves the Republicans significantly further down the road to getting the kind of tax system they want, and a deficit reduction plan that would give them one

lowered rates while eliminating egregious tax loopholes and deductions. "Only while the deductions were eliminated, the lobbies that created them were not." The loopholes and other dodges came back, and "by 2006, the top 1 percent of Americans (average net worth of about \$15 million) pays rates fully one-third lower than they did in 1970."

That's Reaganomics. Washington insiders are saying that the tax-cut deal postpones any attempt to tackle deficit reduction. Outgoing House Ways and Means chair Sander Levin calls the deficit commission plan "unbalanced and unworkable." But that doesn't mean Congress won't take up some of its recommendations, once the president has mollified angry Democrats enough to get his deal with McConnell passed. Obama and Republican leaders both say they will use some of those recommendations in their budget proposals early next year.

Daniel Henninger of *The Wall Street Journal* notes, tellingly, that "words found nowhere in the deficit commission's draft include 'fairness,' 'the wealthiest,' and 'the top 1 percent.'" The explicit purpose is to make the United States the safest possible place for capitalists. McConnell said, "It is my hope that this effort will serve as a catalyst for achieving the spending and entitlement reform that our country so desperately needs."

Note that McConnell never mentions tax increases. But he does mention "entitlement reform," which means Social Security and Medicare.

UNDERMINING SOCIAL SECURITY

The temporary 2 percent payroll tax holiday in the president's deal would significantly reduce the money going into the Social Security trust fund. That means the program could run out of money to pay benefits a lot earlier than it's currently projected to (which may be why a number of Republican lawmakers have suggested such a move in

'Words like "fairness," "the wealthiest," and "the top 1 percent," do not appear in the deficit commission report.'

of the lowest sets of tax rates in the world. Permanently.

Are there any silver linings here? The problem with the meager package of measures working people would get in the Obama-McConnell deal is that they are very temporary. And while the Bowles-Simpson plan would eliminate a lot of tax breaks in exchange for those lower rates, the reality is that getting rid of "loopholes" has always been a bit of a fool's game in Washington.

As Bob Borosage, president of the Institute for America's Future, a leading progressive-Democrat organization, pointed out in the Huffington Post recently, the bipartisan 1986 tax reform act did the same thing Bowles and Simpson are proposing:

the past). The Obama-McConnell deal calls for the government to fill the gap with other tax revenues. But that would place Social Security in competition with everything else the government does, robbing the program of its fiscal independence.

Besides, in today's Washington, there's little chance that a "temporary" 2 percent payroll tax break won't be extended and eventually made permanent, further reducing the program's self-sufficiency. That would be "the beginning of the end of Social Security as we know it," says Barbara Kennelly, president of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare.

Continued on page 14

MEET THE SOCIAL SECURITY WRECKING CREW

ERSKINE BOWLES

Co-chair of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, he was chief of staff in the second Clinton administration, where he pushed for deficit reduction and cutting entitlements. Bowles has spent most of his career as an investment banker and is a director of Morgan Stanley & Co., for which he reportedly receives \$335,000 a year. One widely discussed idea for reducing the federal deficit that his commission didn't consider was a tax on financial transactions.



MITCH MCCONNELL

Senator from Kentucky and Republican minority leader, he was also chief negotiator in the talks with the Obama administration that recently ended in a deal to extend the Bush tax cuts. His importance as a Republican leader has grown steadily since the Democrats retook control of Congress in 2006, as he has consistently organized his party to oppose every major Obama initiative. Earlier this year, he said, "The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president."



BARACK OBAMA

He charged his deficit commission with developing a plan to balance the budget over the next five years and "propos[ing] recommendations to the President that meaningfully improve the long-run fiscal outlook, including changes to address the growth of entitlement spending." It went further than that, proposing a tax-reduction scheme and a full-fledged plan to slash Social Security and Medicare. While Obama defended Social Security against privatization during his presidential campaign, he never explicitly rejected cutting the program. "We're going to have to take on entitlements and I think we've got to do it quickly," he said in an October 2008 debate with Republican candidate John McCain.



PETE PETERSON

A Wall Street legend, Peterson co-founded and made a large fortune at the Blackstone Group, one of the world's largest private equity firms. For nearly 30 years, he has campaigned to cut the deficit, principally by slashing Social Security and Medicare. The Concord Coalition, the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB) and his own Peter G. Peterson Foundation are just a few of the groups he has bankrolled. The president's deficit commission is another, since the Peterson Foundation and the CRFB supplied two senior

staffers free of charge to help keep the commission's expenses down. Peterson generally uses conciliatory language, stressing that he wants to restore Social Security to fiscal solvency, not destroy it. But every now and then a different intention peeks through. In 1996, he wrote in a magazine article, "I have concluded — reluctantly — that a fully funded, privately managed, and portable system of personal retirement accounts should be mandatory. The system I envision would initially supplement Social Security — and over time might increasingly substitute for it."

HARRY REID

As Senate minority leader in 2005, Reid — along with House minority leader Nancy Pelosi — was instrumental in sending President Bush's campaign to privatize Social Security down to humiliating defeat, paving the way for the Democrats to regain control of Congress the next year. Still in command of the Senate, Reid will play perhaps the leading role as Congress works through the president's tax-cut deal with the Republicans and considers adoption of the deficit commission's recommendations.



ALAN SIMPSON

Bowles' co-chair was a longtime Republican senator from Wyoming who co-sponsored his first bill to cut and partially privatize Social Security in 1995. He has also campaigned against organizations that defend the program, such as the AARP. Simpson is a popular figure in Washington, where he tends to make off-the-wall, insulting statements. He ran into trouble early in the commission's existence, when he told an activist, "We're trying to take care of the lesser people," a gaffe he compounded a few days later by calling Social Security "a milk cow with 310 million tits."

FIGHTING FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

Strengthen Social Security is a coalition made up of more than 200 national and state organizations that are calling on Congress and the White House to protect and expand Social Security not dismantle or privatize it. The next meeting of the New York City chapter of the Campaign to Strengthen Social Security will be held Friday December 17 from 10 am to noon at the Teamsters Local 237 union hall at 216 West 14th Street. For more information, see strengthensocialsecurity.org.

—INDEPENDENT STAFF

Back to the Poorhouse?

By ARUN GUPTA

Any discussion of the global assault on pensions must begin with the three-year-long capitalist crisis, particularly the historical and geographical conditions.

The economic crisis is being used to batter the remnants of the social welfare state. Having decimated aid to the poor over the last 30 years, especially in the United States, the economic and political elite are now strangling middle-class benefits, namely state-provided pensions, healthcare and education.

The initial neoliberal assault under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher 30 years ago reorganized the capitalist economy and hammered private-sector unions into submission. This was accomplished by putting labor back into competition with itself by off-shoring industrial production, deregulation and frontal attacks on labor rights, organizing and solidarity.

Similarly, the current attack is a two-pronged effort to reorganize state social services, either by eliminating or privatizing them, and to decimate public-sector unions that fulfill these services. While social services are starved, police and spying agencies are metastasizing their powers and funding, and the wealth of the super-rich and record corporate profits are off-limits to close any government budget gap.

Simply put, the elderly are superfluous to capitalism. If successful, efforts to cut social benefits will increase the pool of unemployed and drive down wages. The main beneficiaries will be the super-wealthy who gain both from tax cuts as the social sector is chopped up and higher corporate profits as wages and benefits are slashed more and more.

The attack on pensions is mainly occurring in the West and those countries close to its orbit. So while countries including the United States, Japan, France, Greece, Ireland, Turkey, Spain, Poland and Latvia have been cutting or trying to squeeze state-run pensions, others such as Bolivia, China and Venezuela have been increasing funding of old-age pensions in recent years (though within these countries social spending may be declining overall and inflation increasing).

ROBBING GRANDMA

While the right has stridently opposed Social Security since it was enacted in 1935, the modern attack on pensions originated during the Reagan-Thatcher era. As president, Reagan temporarily froze cost-of-living adjustments, raised the future retirement age to 67, taxed benefits of higher-income earners, made it more difficult for the disabled to claim benefits and forced the self-employed to pay 100 percent of payroll taxes. Then under Clinton, claim some economists, inflation was understated to suppress cost-of-living adjustments, resulting in benefits that should be 50 percent higher than the current average of \$1,072 a month. Thatcher and Tony Blair formed the same one-two punch as Reagan and Clinton, but they went further by privatizing much of the state pension system.

The second historical component is the current crisis, which is severely widening the economic chasm. According to the *New York Times*, U.S. corporate profits “have grown for seven consecutive quarters, at some of the fastest rates in history,” hitting a record of \$1.66 trillion on an annual basis. Taking advantage of Federal Reserve and U.S. Treasury monies, Wall Street has



Please sir, can I have some more?

PHOTO: BBC

notched record profits over the last two years. And the top one percent actually increased their share of the wealth by the end of 2009.

The overall economic picture is dire: industrial production is back to where it was in 2000 and the all-important capacity utilization rate — which measures use of productive capacity — is below 75 percent, compared to a level above 80 percent before the crash. The trade deficit is at 3.7 percent of the gross domestic product. Only 874,000 jobs were created during the first 10 months of 2010, not enough to keep up with population growth, and some 260,000 state workers lost their jobs during this period, leaving 7.5 million fewer jobs than when the recession began.

The household picture is even grimmer: family income shrank more than 4 percent in 2008 and 2009; the official poverty rate of 14.3 is the highest since 1994; 13.5 percent of home mortgages are in delinquency or foreclosure; the percentage of people receiving health insurance through their employer has dropped by 13 percent over the last decade. The real unemployment rate, the “U6 rate,” is at 17 percent, and household debt stands at 118 percent of after-tax income.

The conclusion is stark: there is no engine to drive the economy. And these conditions prevail throughout the West, which is the backdrop for the global assault on pension plans.

ECONOMIC FUNK

With so much idle productive capacity, giving tax breaks to spur business investment is throwing away money. Americans are drowning in debt and getting smacked with rising healthcare costs. Having lost \$15.8 trillion in wealth and fearing joining the army of unemployed, they are incapable of increasing consumption enough to drag the economy out of its funk. One possibility is increased trade, which would require a weaker dollar to make U.S. exports more competitive. But, as Paul Krugman points out, Republicans oppose this because they believe continued economic decline will enhance their electoral chances in 2012.

When business investment, consumption, trade, debt and speculation all falter, only government can revive a capitalist economy. But, as *The Independent* first pointed out in December 2008, the Obama administration knew the stimulus would fail. The downturn was sapping a staggering \$1 trillion a year from the economy, but the plan offered a relatively meager \$787 billion over more than two years, and much of that was in useless tax breaks.

The stimulus only covered some of the shortfall in state and local budgets. With this funding drying up, state services and workers are now under attack.

The failed stimulus was also premised on the limits of Keynesian economics, which calls for deficit spending to spur business

when it's in a downturn.

This plays in the right-wing hysteria over the federal debt. Debt matters but the best way to reduce it is through economic growth and inflation, as happened to the huge U.S. debt coming out of WWII. Right-wing policies such as austerity and cutting spending and taxes — which Obama has endorsed — may create a worst-case scenario of deflation and further economic contraction. This will make federal debt payments even more onerous.

STICK IT TO THE RICH

The simple solution would be to tax the wealth of the elite, instead of debt-driven financing. According to economist Rick Wolff, “high-net-worth” Americans have around \$12 trillion in investable assets, which excludes the value of their homes. A 13 percent wealth tax would eliminate the entire 2010 federal budget deficit of \$1.56 trillion while doing little to crimp consumption because this money is literally lying around.

The pro-Wall Street Obama administration never considered a program of re-industrialization because this would have required redistribution either indirectly through debt-driven financing of jobs programs (which would shore up wages and labor bargaining power) or directly by taxing the rich to pay for rebuilding the global economy after they torched it.

Obama has consistently fought for policies that involve weakening labor, driving down wages, letting unemployment rise, and squeezing social services and benefits, all to transfer more wealth upward.

The wealthy have profited three times off the crisis: from the bubble itself, from the bailouts and from government bonds sold to them to pay for the bailouts. Putting pensions on the chopping block would give them a fourth opportunity to profit off the same crisis.

If government debt is a problem, then bondholders should take a haircut because they took the risk. Of course, that's not how capitalism works. So, in the case of Social Security, which has nearly \$2.6 trillion in its trust fund and can meet ALL obligations through 2037, the plan is to raid it to pay off bondholders.

That's why a crisis is being manufactured. Obama's deal to reduce payroll tax by two percentage points will pilfer an estimated \$120 billion from the trust fund, which will supposedly be paid back by revenues from the general treasury. This means the deficit will increase, and amplify the echo-chamber panic over Social Security and debt.

Cutting pensions will be disastrous to long-term economic health. Social Security accounts for 40 percent of the income of the population over 65 and nearly 50 percent for women in this group. This also means more people in the workforce as older workers delay retirement. Because the elderly tend to spend their benefits right away, on housing, food, transportation and medical services, this means lower economic activity. And combining all this with trying to crush public workers also means more unemployed, less tax revenue and a shrinking economy.

It all adds up to a recipe for a long-term depression. The conclusion is inescapable even if liberals are unable to admit it: Obama is far more Herbert Hoover than FDR, and only left movements that steer clear of the tomb of the Democratic Party can create positive change.

AFTER CANCÚN



mac mcgill

BY CHRIS WILLIAMS

Cancún is slowly slipping into the Caribbean Sea. A combination of climate change, natural weather patterns and disastrous, hell-for-leather tourist development along the narrow strip of Mexican coast is dragging the resort town back whence it came.

Gargantuan hotel complexes built too near the shore and the eradication of coastal vegetation that held the beach together, along with rising sea levels and stronger hurricanes meant \$70 million was spent last year to replace the sand swallowed by the sea. This was on top of a similar \$19 million beach restoration in 2006.

The next dredge and restoration won't be long coming. Unlike the global environment, Cancún is so profitable to Mexican and foreign capital — income is estimated at \$3 billion a year, about one-fourth of Mexico's entire tourist economy — that it must be saved.

But it comes at the expense of massive undersea devastation from dredging millions of cubic yards of sand and the impact when all that sand washes back and buries coral reefs that are the breeding grounds of myriad oceanic species.

The defense of Cancún contrasts markedly with the situation in Vanuatu, an archipelago nation that is being forced to relocate hundreds of people from encroaching South Pacific waters. Or the plight of the people in

the small Alaskan village of Kivalina, who are desperately erecting sea walls to keep the Chukchi Sea at bay.

Cancún was therefore perhaps a perfect location and metaphor for the 16th U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, which ended Dec. 10. As Cancún slowly slides toward the abyss, so the conference slipped below the mainstream media's radar and other coastal regions around the globe are left to drown and we all stifle as global warming continues under the business-as-usual climate.

It's always been difficult to pinpoint where the truth ends and the lies begin with international climate conferences, but thanks to WikiLeaks we have a much better idea. In Copenhagen, during high-profile climate negotiations in 2009, bribery, blackmail, bullying, threats and spying were the order of the day. *The Guardian* reports:

"The U.S. diplomatic cables reveal how the U.S. seeks dirt on nations opposed to its approach to tackling global warming; how financial and other aid is used by countries to gain political backing; how distrust, broken promises and creative accounting dog negotiations; and how the U.S. mounted a secret global diplomatic offensive to overwhelm opposition to the controversial 'Copenhagen accord,' the unofficial document that emerged from the ruins of the Copenhagen climate change summit in 2009."

You don't have to be a wild-eyed revolutionary to conclude that the United States is intent on remaining the world's only superpower and discards

all other considerations, even the possibility of precipitating civilization's collapse. As the tectonic plates of world power shift, the governing U.S. and corporate elite are locked in a zero-sum game with the other major economic players that are trying to supplant them in a planetary dance of death.

The never-ending competitive drive for profit and the imperial machinations that flow from it dictate the chronic inability of world leaders to cobble together any serious deal to arrest planetary ecocide.

In Cancún, the only way negotiators could reach a "fairly modest" agreement that "do[es] not require the broad changes that scientists say are needed to avoid dangerous climate change" was by ignoring their own rules on decision making and overruling the objections of countries like Bolivia, according to *The New York Times*.

As Greenpeace International Climate Policy Director Wendel Trio commented, "Cancún may have saved the process but it did not yet save the climate."

THE WORD FOR WORLD IS PROFIT

Capitalism is an exploitative global simplification project. For example, it is difficult to efficiently extract profit from a forest teeming with plant and animal life. However, if that forest is replaced by fast-growing eucalyptus trees, then profit extraction is greatly facilitated. Hence, at Cancún, one of the few concrete outcomes was enshrining as an "achievement" the U.N. scheme known as Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and

Degradation (REDD) despite widespread opposition. A Friends of the Earth report on REDD released on the eve of the conference described how corporations were being financially rewarded for ransacking and burning forests and converting them into monoculture plantations while allowing developed countries to receive carbon credits.

The only other tangible result was an agreement on technology transfer and finances — though there was no specific plan for funding.

Internationally, the Obama administration is bent on derailing climate talks and deregulating the only internationally binding climate treaty — the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. This is despite the fact that the United States never signed on, and the Kyoto Protocol's weak limits on reducing the rate of build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are incapable of preventing rapid climate change.

The United States, flanked by Russia, Canada and Japan, wants to turn Kyoto's binding limits into voluntary emissions controls varying from country to country. Under this new deregulated regime, no onus will be placed on the industrialized nations historically responsible for the ecological crisis, nor will an overall global emissions target be enacted. A direct confrontation in Cancún was avoided only by punting the decision to extend the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012, to the November 2011 round of climate talks in Durban, South Africa.

DRILL, OBAMA, DRILL

Domestically, the Obama administration is as committed to developing fossil fuels as the Bush administration was. On Oct. 28, *The New York Times* noted that in the five years prior to October 2010 the Interior Department had approved more than 73,000 oil and gas leases. Last March, Obama announced the opening of much of the Atlantic seaboard to offshore drilling, claiming it was a safe endeavor no longer prone to spills.

Obama's other priorities include "clean" coal technology — a technology that does not currently exist; the development and expansion of "safe," "clean" nuclear power — a technology that will never exist; a new oil pipeline from Canada's tar sands; continued subsidies for ethanol from corn; and a large expansion of ethanol production from agro-fuels. And the White House may soon approve offshore drilling in the Arctic.

In contrast, the Interior Department has green-lighted only one offshore wind project and not a single solar project. A plan to build, for a mere \$5 billion, a 6,000-megawatt offshore wind farm along the East Coast with a more efficient power transmission grid, will be financed by corporations if the project can clear regulations. The amount of energy is equivalent to five large nuclear plants but for a small fraction of the cost — not to mention radioactivity. Despite this, there is no money forthcoming from the federal government.

Even as the U.S. government cannot develop renewable energy domestically because it is supposedly too expensive or unreliable, the Pentagon is ramping up its renewable capacity. According to the *New York Times*, U.S. military commanders "have come to see over-dependence on fossil fuel as a big liability, and

Continued on page 14



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REVIEWS

Stealing the Rainbow

For Colored Girls
DIRECTED BY TYLER PERRY
LIONSGATE, 2010

When I first heard about Tyler Perry's plan to direct a film version of ntozake shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, I considered committing homicide.

Allow me to explain. shange wrote these poems, infused them with dance and wove them into a cohesive performance of black American womanhood in the 1970s. It was, quite literally, poetry in motion — a self-described choreopoem. In it, she boldly declared a new liberation, free from shame and victimhood, healing the pain of black women by exposing it — giving it a voice through monologues dealing with poverty, abuse, sexuality and the fight for respect. And in this rainbow of self-affirmation, there was infinite room for the many shades of blackness and the varied hues of feminism.

As a black woman, I can say that my life was profoundly touched and, I daresay, shaped by the beautiful rainbow she painted.

And then along comes Tyler Perry. This is the man whose canon includes such blockbusterers as *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* and *Why Did I Get Married* — whose most salient commentary on black womanhood thus far has been a man in a dress.

When I saw the billboard for the movie, I had a glimmer of hope. *For Colored Girls* has a beautiful cast. Well respected. Immensely talented. Thandie Newton (*Be-Loved*) could act out the phonebook. Anika Noni Rose's (*Dreamgirls*) voice is captivatingly melodic. Phylicia Rashad (*The Cosby Show*) could bring grace to a catfight.

But none of that was enuf.

After viewing the film, I do not believe that Perry was motivated by any benevolent desire to empower black women, as shange intended. He deviates from the original text at whim. He creates one new female character (the lady in White, played by Whoopie Goldberg), rearranges poems and, perhaps worst of all, introduces male characters.

About halfway in, I figured out his goal: humanize black men, no matter what the cost to their female counterparts. To do this, he introduces the usual lineup of black men,

all made of such thin cardboard: the "good brother," the "crazy nigga," the "down-low brother," the "low-down nigga." To bring flesh to these cliché bones, Perry offers shange's vision as a sacrifice.

Perhaps the most out of place was the fiercely closeted, self-hating bisexual husband, Frank (played by Omari Hardwick). But then again, I'm not sure if that title applies, since Perry goes out of his way to emphasize Frank's struggle to assert himself in his marriage to the all-too-common cold, emasculating black bitch. The story of his wife, Jo, played by Janet Jackson, is rendered immaterial, so much so that when she contracts HIV (of course), the audience can't help but think that some of the blame rests with her.

Indeed, blaming the victim proves to be Perry's strategy of choice in his attempt to "reclaim" this story for black men. Throughout the over-performance of a mother's story of domestic violence, Perry strips the mother of all her agency. He omits the part in shange's original play where Crystal (played by Kimberly Elise) kicks out the father of her children, Beau Willie, and gets a restraining order. She exists only as his victim, but she loves him anyway.

By the time the father, played by Michael Ealy, finally murders the children by dropping them from the fifth-floor window, the blame has even spread beyond the mother. The social worker, Kelly, played by Kerry Washington, is complicit because she failed to rescue the kids in time; Gilda (Phylicia Rashad) the neighbor and babysitter, should not have allowed the kids to go back home.

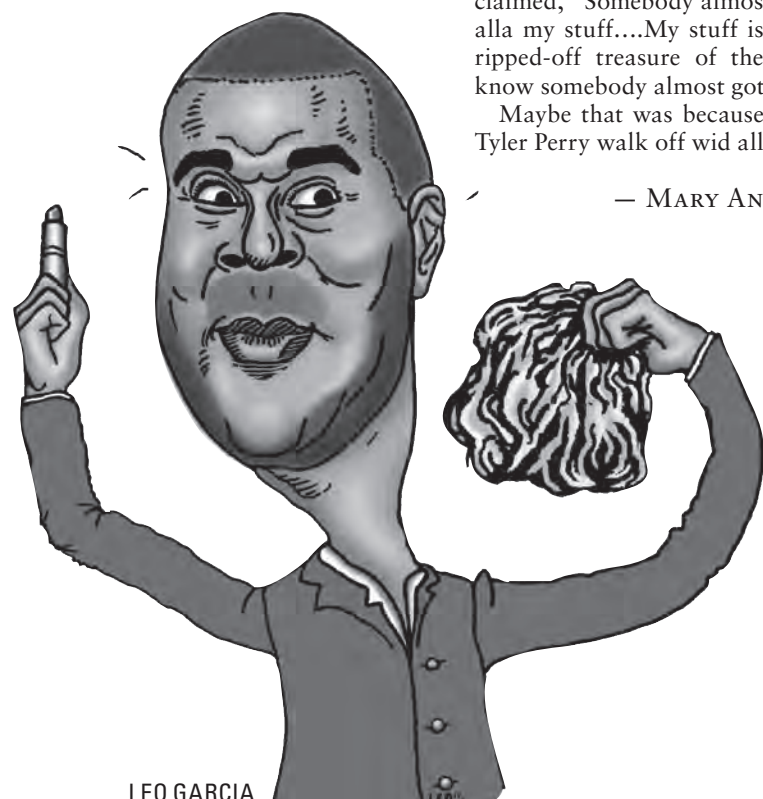
After fighting tooth and nail to save her children and surviving a suicide attempt, this grief-stricken woman is told that she "has to take some responsibility." If ever there was a moment in which Rashad should have gotten the taste slapped out of her mouth, it was when she delivered those lines.

It was heartbreakingly disempowering to hear shange's poetry in male voices. It was especially bitter to hear the "good brother" police officer, played by Hill Harper, recounting the experience of rape as he takes his victim's statement. He was also taking her voice. The whole spectacle of *For Colored Girls* felt like literary rape.

I found myself waiting for Juanita, played by Loretta Devine (*Waiting to Exhale*), to speak. Not that her character was free from cliché, but because she seemed to have most of the poetry that was still mixed schizophrenically into the script. I had never noticed how rhythmic her voice was before. I could actually believe her when she exclaimed, "Somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff....My stuff is the anonymous ripped-off treasure of the year! Did you know somebody almost got away wid me?"

Maybe that was because I was watching Tyler Perry walk off wid alla my stuff.

— MARY ANNAÏSE HEGLAR



LEO GARCIA



RAÚL CORRALES, *LA CABALLERIA (CAVALRY)*, 1960.

PHOTO: © The Corrales Estate, Havana, Cuba. Courtesy The International Art Heritage Foundation.

Here's Looking at Che

"Cuba in Revolution"
INTERNATIONAL CENTER
OF PHOTOGRAPHY
THROUGH JAN. 9, 2011

You've seen it on T-shirts, buttons and even bobbleheads: the high-contrast, cropped image of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, radiating hardscrabble idealism and a higher purpose. This image is so ubiquitous that it has become something of a ready-made parody: it's a symbol that seems to symbolize only itself. When the image does appear in earnest, though, it appears as the badge of a revolutionary mindset, but *which* revolution?

This photo, titled *Heroic Guerrilla*, is at the center of "Cuba in Revolution," a photojournalism exhibition at the International Center of Photography that features more than 180 vintage works by 30 photographers. *Heroic Guerrilla*, taken by Alberto Korda, shows Che attending a memorial service in March 1960 for victims of the *La Coubre* explosion. Fifty years later, it's one of the most reproduced photos in the world.

The exhibition stretches from the 1940s through the 1959 uprising, when Che, Fidel Castro and a cadre of armed intellectuals overthrew then-President Fulgencio Batista's brutal dictatorship. The show ends in the less idealistic late sixties.

Cuba's communism still generates heated debate — there are ardent fans and bitter exiles. Looking at these photographs, though, one can imagine that in that momentous burst, in that sudden rewriting of history, it must have been tremendously exciting.

As filmmaker Jeffrey Skoller puts it in his book *Shadows, Specters, Shards*: "From the vantage point of the cynical 21st century, it is hard to understand just how romantic and full of meaning the victory of the Cuban Revolution

was for young Latin Americans. After a century of brutal imperialist domination there was now the sense of possibility for progressive social change — not just in Latin America but throughout the developing world."

Indeed, the revolution drew in photographers and filmmakers from around the globe; the exhibition includes not just the work of native Cubans, but also great images by British, U.S. and French photographers.

The astute photos of Constantino Arias, which document life in pre-revolutionary Cuba from the 1940s to 1950s, show drunken tourists and lavish oil industry fêtes in vast ballrooms — doomed dances of archaic, opulent splendor. Those photos are countered with harsher shots showing the realities of the period, including people struggling in slums (these images, unfortunately, feel a lot less archaic). The exhibit then moves into the thick of the revolution with photos by Tirso Martinez and Andrew Saint-George depicting scruffy guerrillas in jungle camps in the Sierra Maestra. Elsewhere, we find public celebrations, determined soldiers and even a charging cavalry — propaganda, naturally, but still gripping, as good propaganda often is. There are some harrowing photos but there seems

to be a conspicuous lack of real violence in these images of a violent revolution. Discordant yet personal photos by José Figueroa (who began his career as Korda's assistant) show young Cubans reveling in banned rock'n'roll, and the exhibit ends with the Cuban government's crackdown on unauthorized photographs — twin reminders of how revolutions can sour.

But the main focus of the exhibition, of course, is Che and Castro: the show finds them speaking with foreign dignitaries, gazing out of hagiographic portraits, and even playing baseball, which looks a bit strange. The beautiful imagery here did not happen by chance. The Cuban revolutionaries understood the power of a good photograph and they deliberately spun their historical moment into an aesthetic — a fashion even (there are reasons why their outfits were so cool).

A haunting series by Brian Moser shows the crowds around Che's corpse right after he was killed in Bolivia in 1967 — with his bearded, beatific face, it's all unmistakably Christ-like. If *Heroic Guerrilla* has been reproduced into near-nothingness, perhaps that's a natural consequence of turning men into symbols. Symbols, as we know, can be erased.

—MIKE NEWTON



ALBERTO KORDA in front of his famous snapshot *Guerrillero Heroico*, and holding a 3 Cuban Peso banknote, which also bears his photo. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

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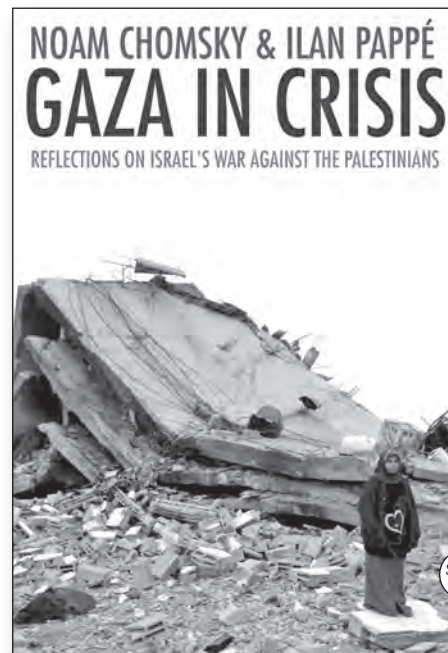
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Noam Chomsky & Ilan Pappé Gaza in Crisis

REFLECTIONS ON ISRAEL'S WAR AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS

Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians

Described by a UN fact-finding mission as "a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate, and terrorize a civilian population," Israel's Operation Cast Lead thrust the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip into the center of the debate about the Israel/Palestine conflict.

In *Gaza in Crisis*, Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, two of the issue's most insightful and prominent critical voices, survey the fallout from Israel's conduct in Gaza and place it into the context of Israel's long-standing occupation of Palestine.

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Reaganomics

Continued from page 9

Bowles and Simpson go even further. Besides eroding Social Security's inflation protection feature, they would gradually raise the retirement age. The objective is partly to lower the long-term cost of Social Security — the later you retire, the smaller your lifetime benefit — by motivating Americans to keep working past retirement age. But it wouldn't be that simple. More elderly are staying in the workforce already, because the value of Social Security benefits is eroding while the cost of healthcare for seniors skyrockets. But many employers shun older workers, fearing they will demand more money and possibly boost health insurance costs. Those who can find jobs frequently have to settle for low-wage, temporary, often physically demanding positions. The net result is to swell the ranks of the minimum wage and casual workforce, helping keep wages low.

And what about workers who spend their whole careers at hard physical labor and can't keep on working after retirement age? Bowles and Simpson recommend cre-

ating a "hardship exemption," allowing them to start receiving benefits according to the current schedule. But they don't spell out how this would work. How would "physically demanding" work be defined? Would each and every individual have to be evaluated before being allowed to collect benefits? And who would do this? The Social Security Administration and other agencies that administer the Disability Insurance program would be the logical choice. But they are so overwhelmed that workers applying for disability often face a years-long ordeal just to find out if they are eligible.

Bowles and Simpson also propose to means-test Social Security, cutting benefits for higher-wage workers. While that might sound progressive, the definition of "higher wage" would have to extend deep down into the middle class in order to save significant money. Members of the middle class, who no longer enjoy lifetime pensions from their employers, are in much more danger of ending their lives in poverty than they used to be.

For instance: Social Security Works, a research and advocacy group in Washington, calculates that under Bowles-Simpson, a 25-year-old worker who retires in 2050 at age 65 with a career-average wage of \$68,934

would see her Social Security benefit cut by more than one-third. Social Security is not that generous a system to begin with.

At that rate, the program would be well on its way to irrelevance for a great many Americans. On the road to extinction, that is.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Congressional Democrats are mad at being left out of the deliberations while Republicans and the White House concluded their deal. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont said initially that he would "do everything I can to defeat this proposal," including staging a filibuster. As *The Independent* goes to press, other leading Democrats, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, are signaling that they would end their opposition to the measure in return for minor concessions. During this time of economic suffering, it shouldn't have been impossible to win the battle for public opinion by emphasizing that Republicans were holding the tax cuts of ordinary Americans hostage to gain tax breaks for billionaires. But Obama ducked that fight before it began, and it appears many Democrats will follow the same path of least resistance.

Whatever the case, passage of the Obama-McConnell deal would clear the way for

consideration of some of the Bowles-Simpson proposals. In 2011, Republicans will no doubt press for adoption of lower tax rates — Obama reportedly is considering a proposal of his own, aiming to beat them at their own game. The deficit hawks, meanwhile, will be looking for a deal on Social Security. Much of this is possible because in the spring the administration will be asking Congress to raise the national debt limit, enabling the Treasury to borrow enough to keep government functioning. The price of cooperation in the Republican House will no doubt be high.

I tend to dislike sports metaphors, but in this case I can't resist: The deficit hawks have pitched a fat one right across the plate. Unless someone steps in quickly to stop them, the free-market conservatives are about to hit it out of the ballpark.

Eric Laursen is co-author of Understanding the Crash, an illustrated history of the policies that led to the 2008 economic collapse, and author of The People's Pension: The War Against Social Security from Reagan to Obama (AK Press, spring 2012). His writings are available at peoplespension.infoshop.org/blogs-mu.

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Cancún

Continued from page 11

renewable technologies — which have become more reliable and less expensive over the past few years — as providing a potential answer. These new types of renewable energy now account for only a small percentage of the power used by the armed forces, but military leaders plan to rapidly expand their use over the next decade."

So, if our elected leaders refuse to take protecting the environment seriously, what is possible? Can we have renewable energy and ditch fossil fuels? How are we going to mount a campaign to force through real change?

First, can we obtain all our energy from renewable energy sources?

Scientific American reported in 2008 that the United States could obtain 69 percent of its electrical needs from solar energy alone by 2050 with the input of \$420 billion over the next 40 years, less than half of what we spend on military and intelligence agencies in one year. This alone would reduce U.S. carbon dioxide emissions by 62 percent compared to 2005. A more recent *Scientific American* report claimed that 100 percent of global energy could come from renewable sources by building 3.8 million large wind turbines and 90,000 solar panels in 20 years. This sounds like a lot until you compare it to the 80 million cars manufactured every year.

These examples indicate that moving the world toward a low-carbon, clean energy future is a social and political problem, not a technological one. It's not hard to outline how to redirect the U.S. economy toward providing millions of jobs, cleaning up the atmosphere and creating a better, healthier standard of living.

Such measures could include:

- Creating millions of real green jobs to build a new energy infrastructure and electricity power grid
- Ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and withdrawing all troops immediately
- Re-regulating corporations in the interests of health, safety and protection of the environment
- Shifting subsidies away from fossil fuels and toward renewables

- Increasing taxes on corporations and the rich to pre-Reagan era levels, and using those revenues for worker retraining programs
- Instituting a moratorium on deep-sea off-shore drilling, mountain-top removal for coal extraction and hydrofracking for natural gas
- Implementing a massive government program of energy-conservation retrofitting of residences
- Updating the ramshackle and inadequate sewage system
- Building city-wide, regional and national public transit systems while pedestrianizing downtown urban areas and building more bike lanes.

But unless we can build a working-class-based movement to organize and fight for such a scenario, the priorities of the corporations will always come first — even if they are undermining their own existence in the long run.

People are already fighting back and we can take inspiration from the revolt of students and workers in Europe and the revolt of workers and peasants in Latin America, as well as learning about periods such as the 1930s and 1960s when it was the people of the United States who led the world in social revolt and left-wing political organizing.

Ultimately, the problem is systemic. To paraphrase Marx, any class-based exploitative social system eventually becomes a fetter to further social development. As coral reef researcher J.E.N. Vernon chillingly reports in *Yale Environment 360*, "Unless we change the way we live, the Earth's coral reefs will be utterly destroyed within our children's lifetimes." Note that Vernon does not say grandchildren's lifetimes.

We need to build a socio-ecological movement that takes up the slogan "System Change, Not Climate Change" because Cancún illustrates once more that our leaders are impervious to the arguments of science, the evidence before their eyes or the moral imperative to act in the interests of those who elected them.

Chris Williams is a professor of physics and chemistry at Pace University and author of Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis.

PHOTO: FRANKREYNOSO



Below the Street

For those staying in NYC over the holidays — do something fun and avoid the usual crowds.

The underground has been on our minds a lot lately, spurred largely by the “Underbelly Project” — the street art exhibit staged in an unbuilt and inaccessible subway station, whose massive media coverage has reignited interest in exploring other unused, abandoned and out-of-the-way city property.*

Some of the old stations are well known. For an easy one, stay on the downtown 6 train after the last stop — Brooklyn Bridge — and watch as it loops around through the old City Hall Station, which was built in 1904 and closed in 1945. The 18th Street station on the Lexington line and the 91st Street station on the Seventh Avenue line were each closed down after the platforms of neighboring subway stations (located at Union Square and 86th Street, respectively) were lengthened in the 1940s and 1950s. You can still see them from a passing train.

But there’s also at least one opportunity to see an abandoned subway station on foot — legally. Every other Sunday, in downtown Brooklyn, hundreds of people line up and descend, one by one, down a manhole in the middle of Atlantic Avenue.

They show up to explore the Atlantic Avenue tunnel, one of the most bragged-about, mythologized and misunderstood places in New York Transit lore, and also the world’s oldest subway tunnel (operational from 1844 until 1861).

Bob Diamond rediscovered the sealed-up tunnel in 1982, and has been leading tours ever since. His tour includes information about the discovery and creation of the tunnel, as well as other stories that’ll make you lose your faith in city government all over again as you wander in the warm, slightly damp underground that still bears impressions of train tracks.

Each tour is a unique experience; on a recent December afternoon we heard stories of river pirates, German World War I-era saboteurs, Manhattan mountain ranges, poison gas and five-foot-tall rats. Many people believe that the hidden far end of the tunnel holds an abandoned steam locomotive. Last year Bob announced he’d made a deal with *National Geographic* to fund and film the excavation, but the project is still contingent on city approval.

In other stories of old New York: the City Reliquary, repository of all things endearingly musty, is in the last month of “Forgotten City Lights: A Photographic Archive of NYC’s Street Lampposts.” The show, which is curated by Kevin Walsh, the blogger and webmaster of forgotten-ny.com, features drawings, blueprints and photographs taken by MTA employee Bob Mulero, who’s been photographing lampposts since the 1970s.

The lampposts “show an often overlooked history of the city that is available to all residents and passersby,” Dave Herman, the museum’s founder, told me. Unlike many of the city’s community spaces, the Reliquary, which was founded in 2002 in a ground-

floor apartment, still retains its commendably unpretentious aura.

As much as the items on display, the visit itself feels like going through someone’s attic. On display is an entire wall of photos of the Statue of Liberty, a cornucopia of New York City tap water in a variety of containers and geological tidbits that tell the story of New York.

“Forgotten City Lights” runs through January and will be followed by an exhibition about pizza slices.

—IRINA IVANOVA

HOW TO GET THERE:

The City Reliquary is at 370 Metropolitan Ave.; you can find them at 718-782-4842 (when they’re open) or at cityreliquary.org. Always free (but donations are accepted).

To reserve a spot for the Atlantic Tunnel tour, call 718-941-3160. The next two tours will take place Dec. 19 and Jan. 9. The tour costs \$15, which goes to the Brooklyn Historic Railway Association, the nonprofit created to preserve and promote the tunnel (visit brooklynrail.net). Bring your own flashlight.

**“The Underbelly Project” is created by more than 100 street artists at an undisclosed underground location believed to be the never-completed South 4th Street station in South Williamsburg. After The New York Times covered the show, the surge of interest from urban explorers prompted a parallel surge in police presence at the site, who have since arrested more than 20 visitors for trespassing.*



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FORGOTTEN-NY.COM

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