Bush Declares His Intent To ‘Change the World’

While President Bush may have appeared less than candid about the war in Iraq, he did manage to focus on aspects of the war that might praise him for inadvertently speaking the truth. There are indeed “two rich and the other for the rest, is utterly wage. He concludes: “The idea that there from the working class! He

Sometimes the most damning indictments of capitalism come from within the obscenity itself—from the apologists, the voices of reaction, the obstructionists who stand in the way of real change, the defenders of a degenerate economic system, the servants of capital. They do not intend to reveal the truth, of course. Rather, it emerges as a sort of “let them eat cake” foot-in-mouth phenomenon. Consider the words of Mortimer B. Zuckerman, editor-in-chief of U.S. News & World Report, in a recent editorial. He laments recent corporate scandals: “Abuses by CEOs eroded confidence in capitalism. Such outrages must never happen again.” He then asks, “Have we saved capitalism from the capitalists?”

Zuckerman is at least honest or perhaps arrogant enough to use the word “capitalism.” Most bourgeois propagandists will not use the word, preferring instead to speak euphemistically about American “free enterprise,” “freedom” and “democracy.” However, class-conscious workers know that when ruling-class speechmakers or corporate editorialists go on and on about freedom and democracy they are just mystifying. Our society is capitalist, and capitalist is not synonymous with free or democratic. When the American president or another corporate spokesperson talks about the freedom or democracy to Iraq, Kuwait, Somalia, Nicaragua, Panama, Grenada, Vietnam, Cuba or any of the many other nations “we” have bombed, invaded or starved into submission, they are really talking about bringing the heavy hand of U.S. corporate interests to that nation along with the larceny, plunder and exploitation associated with those corporate interests. So, let us acknowledge Zuckerman for at least naming the criminal system he so wants to preserve.

The problem Zuckerman has with his precious capitalism is that too much is being stolen from the working class! He states that CEO pay in 1982 was 42 times more than the average worker’s wage and that CEO pay today is a whopping 411 times more than the average worker’s wage. He concludes: “The idea that there are two tracks on the economy, one for the rich and the other for the rest, is utterly corrosive to our system....” Again, we might praise him for inadvertently speaking the truth. There are indeed “two tracks” in this economic system: one for the expropriators of wealth and another for the loved ones of our troops to understand that the mission is an important, vital mission for the security of America and for the ability to change the world for the better.”

Bushi returned to the point a third time when he said “we’re not going to leave [Iraq]. We’re going to do the job. And a free Iraq is going to be a major blow for terrorism. It will change the world. A free Iraq in the midst of the Middle East is vital to future peace and security.”

It would be easy to join in with other critics of the president who dismiss him as an intellectual light-weight and hypocritical tool of American imperialism. Those criticisms may be accurate, as far as they go, but they do not go far enough.

It is true, for example, that Mr. Bush is duplicitous when he condemnsthe Osama bin Laden and others as murderers while simultaneously plotting and condemning acts of murder and assassination. That alone is enough to make plain that our country is being run by men and women who can only be described as thugs in suits.

If there is any difference between the Osama bin Ladens, Saddam Hussein and the George W. Bushes of this world, it has nothing to do with the latter occupying a higher moral ground than the former, or the other way around. What plagues Mr. Bush on a higher plain than a Saddam Hussein or an Osama bin Laden could ever occupy is that capitalism is a dynamic, powerful and progressive force. When compared to the backward-looking ambitions of ruling-class interests in the developing world.

It is also true that capitalism is riddled with contradictions; that it cannot exist without exploiting and despoothing the world and all that is in it, and that its crimes are infinitely greater than those committed by petty tyrants and terrorists because its power to commit them in pursuit of its ambitions is infinitely greater. Nothing could show this more graphically than the fact that 3,000 people died on Sept. 11, 2001, at the hands of Osama bin Laden and 30,000 Iraqis have died since the orders of George W. Bush.

Mr. Bush says that the United States is out to change the world and to make it a safer place, i.e., a safer place for capitalists to do business in. We do not doubt Mr. Bush’s sincerity in that regard, any more than we doubt his willingness to carry out his declared intent to ‘change the world’.
Court Decision Sought End to Racial Segregation

By B.G.

May 17 of this year marks the 50th anniversary of the noted Supreme Court case, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kan., which overturned the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case that had established the judicial fiction of "separate but equal" in race relations.

The Plessy case was the last of a series of Supreme Court cases in the post-Civil War era that strengthened segregation in the South. Even before the North had removed its troops from the South in 1877, bringing an end to Reconstruction and the attempts at enforced equality for African Americans, the U.S. Supreme Court had begun to nibble away at whatever equal rights had been established for the emancipated slaves and free blacks in the southern states.

The 14th Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1868, had defined citizenship and its rights and protections, stating: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

There would eventually be a clean-cut and without ambiguity. The Supreme Court, however, would abridge it considerably before the century was out.

The Plessy v. Ferguson Cases of 1873 were the first judicial review of the provisions of the 14th Amendment. The Louisiana legislature had made a monopoly grant that was contested through the court system as being in violation of the privileges and immunities clause of the 14th Amendment. In a 5-to-4 decision, the court denied the plaintiff and upheld the grant, distinguishing between state and national citizenship, stating that only civil rights derived from federal citizenship were protected by the amendment. The court defined those rights very narrowly. By this decision, civil rights in general were placed under state law protection.

In 1875, to strengthen the protection of civil rights, Congress passed a Civil Rights Act that guaranteed to all people, regardless of color or race, equal rights in public places, such as theaters, inns, public transportation, etc. This law also forbade the denial of jury service to African Americans.

In 1883, five cases known collectively as Civil Rights Cases came before the Supreme Court. These were cases where African Americans had been denied either equal accommodations or equal privileges in defiance of the Civil Rights Act. The Supreme Court declared that law invalid in the matter of protecting social rather than political rights. It further restricted the interpretation of the 14th Amendment by declaring that the amendment protected states from restricting civil rights but did not prevent the restriction of civil rights by individuals unaided by the state. This peculiar interpretation of the 14th Amendment thus virtually ended the federal government's attempts to protect the rights of African Americans and opened up a whole era of discrimination against blacks by private individuals and private institutions.

It was not until after World War II that civil rights again became a political and social issue in the United States. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People aimed its attention at discrimination in the schools.

De Leon examines every major argument—pro and con—on the union question. Issues confusion on what unions can and cannot accomplish sit its sources in the American Federation of Labor, and outlines the general principles of which genuine and effective working-class unions can be built. One of De Leon's best.

Although the nation is now observing the half-century anniversary of the Brown decision, victory did not immediately bring the desired results. There was still at least a decade more of bitter struggle, as African Americans grew weary of waiting a whole century after the end of the Civil War to gain the most rudimentary freedom.

Slavery had existed in all the 13 original American colonies, and became a great convenience to the agrarian capitalists of the South, where it flourished. When slavery was abolished by the Civil War and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, the concept of "inferior" and "superior" races that had been fostered by capitalism necessarily remained. It will take the successful outcome of yet another struggle—the class struggle—before workers of all backgrounds will have the power to collectively enforce their claim to "liberty and justice for all."
California Workers Lose Hazards Case
Fifty-Two Cases Still Pending Against Computer Giant

By Bruce Cozzini

May-June 2004 THE PEOPLE 3

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The ‘End’ of Segregation

May 17, as noted elsewhere in this issue, marks the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education. Brown is widely regarded as a landmark in the struggle of African Americans for equal rights protections under the federal Constitution. For the same reason that morality cannot be legislated, however, no court can simply brush aside historically and culturally embedded ideas and prejudices with a majestic swoosh of its judicial robes.

Race bias and discrimination were too deeply implanted to be uprooted and blown away on command. For nearly a century after the Civil War and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, African Americans throughout the South were subjected to a reign of terror and economic subjugation barely distinguishable from the chattel slavery of ante-bellum days.

The South might as well have won the war for all the difference it made in the day-to-day lives of the freed chattel slaves and their children, the ownership of their offspring, and things were not markedly different in other sections of the country. “Fred Douglass, no less an authority on the subject than he,” as Daniel De Leon once observed, “admitted deliberately, shortly before dying [in 1895], that ‘the present condition of the Negro is truly worse than when he was a chattel slave.’”

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. School Board was not a belated sunburst of judicial enlightenment. It was a product of its time, and its time made it a political and economic necessity.

The Civil War turned the Jim Crow system of racial discrimination and oppression into a political liability in the imperialist struggle for control over Africa and Asia. As the Weekly People of May 29, 1954, explained: “In this contest the strategies of American imperialist labor, under the handicap of the fact that colored minorities in the Western States are subject to segregation and other gross discriminations, the Kremlin rulers have skillfully exploited the vulnerability of their foe, with very damaging effects to the West. Charles D. Jackson, who served as chief of U.S. psychological warfare, was reported by The New York Times, Feb. 22, 1951, as saying that by propagating racial discriminations in the United States, Stalinist propagandists ‘were making incredible trouble for us.’”

The 1950s was also a time of “runaway factories.” They did not run to Mexico or Southeast Asia for cheaper labor, as today, but from North to South. It was the beginning of the “new industrial South.” The Supreme Court certainly underestimated the disorganization and oppression that followed this. The Civil Rights struggle against all forms of oppression and exploitation.

The Brown decision was aimed at providing the legal basis for the struggle of the working people to end the system of exploitation or lift the majority of African-Americans out of enforced poverty. That struggle remains to be resolved in the only way it can be resolved—by drawing all workers together into a class-conscious movement for building the genuine social and economic equality that only a socialist reorganization of society can provide.

Organized Hypocrisy

(Continued on page 5)

A De Leon Editorial

Historic Parallels

Many historic parallels can be drawn between the U.S. occupation of Iraq today and its occupation of the Philippines 100 years ago.

Keen was the remark of Horace Greeley that the test of sincerity against wrong is the readiness of the decider of wrong to raise his voice “against a seemingly as readily as against a faraway wrong.”

A wrong, no doubt, a bloody wrong was perpetrated in Jolo upon a band of Moros entrenched in a fastness. Easy would the work have been of reducing them by famine and thirst. When the place was taken there was hardly any food left, and not a drop of water. Nevertheless, the Army, with a will and determination as relentless as any that was present in the place at that press, and it gloats in advance at the prospect of the assassination of these innocent men—guilty only of activity in organizing their class, the working class, as they have a right to do. The distant outrage is decried; the near-by one is extolled.

It is the readiness of the decrier of wrong to raise his voice “against a nearby as readily as against a faraway wrong.”

Socialism is the collective ownership by all the people of the factories, mills, mines, railroads, land and all other instruments of production. Socialism means production to satisfy human needs, not, as under capitalism, for sale and profit. Socialism means direct control and management of all industries and social services by the workers through a democratic government based on their nationwide economic organization.

Under socialism, all authority will originate from the workers, integrally united in Socialist Industrial Unions. In each workplace, the rank and file will elect what- ever committees or representatives are needed to facilitate production. Within each shop or office division of a plant, the rank and file will participate directly in formulating and implementing all plans necessary for efficient operations.

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Socialism means direct control and management of all industries and social services by the workers through a democratic government based on their nationwide economic organization.
Institution outside the broadcasting industry itself has done more to chase the First Amendment off the "public airwaves" than the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Starting with the destruction of Section 315(a) of the Federal Communications Act of 1934, the so-called Equal Time Law, the commission for decades has bowed before the pressure from every direction and has made for surrendering the public airwaves to the profit interests of the broadcasters. The FCC's only rival in that regard, if it may be called a rival, is the concentration of capital in the communications industry. However, that is the way of things under the capitalist system, and no commission or antitrust law can prevent it from happening. The concentration of wealth and power in the communications industry has gone so far that even some powerful capitalists in other fields have expressed concern.

Now, it seems, the FCC's tolerance has landed in hot water with that element that has appointed itself the watchdog of public morality.

If the FCC had not already abdicated its responsibility of protecting the public airwaves for the general good, the growing controversy over "indecency" on the airwaves might have serious implications for freedom of speech and other civil liberties. Regardless of how the disputants in the present controversy see it as its own "holy war," however, one thing is certain. Restoration of public control over the public airwaves is something that must wait until the working class takes it into its head to reclaim all the natural resources that capitalists have been plundering with virtual impunity since John Jacob Astor "freed" the great American wilderness had been put there to provide him with his "opportunity."

The latest controversy over what is and what is not fit for the broadcasting industry to impose on a long-suffering public seemingly began when rock singer Bono uttered an expletive during the 2003 Golden Globe Awards. Janet Jackson's exposure during half-time entertainment during the 2004 Super Bowl, and other civil liberties. Regardless of how the disputants in the present controversy see it as its own "holy war," however, one thing is certain. Restoration of public control over the public airwaves is something that must wait until the working class takes it into its head to reclaim all the natural resources that capitalists have been plundering with virtual impunity since John Jacob Astor "freed" the great American wilderness had been put there to provide him with his "opportunity."

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Clear Channel is a "giant" of the broadcasting industry. It is one of the capitalist "giants." As occasionally happens in this game, however, it has been set on by some of the lesser predators. Clear Channel has concerns closer to its heart than Howard Stern's ranting or moderate patriotism. "The expletive is politically protected free speech. In Cohen v. California (1971), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that wearing a jacket with the words "F—- the Draft" did not constitute disturbing the peace and that California could not prohibit speech just because it is "offensive."

The House of Representatives has voted to increase the maximum fine for indecency to $500,000. The FCC proposed fining Infinity Broadcasting the current maximum $27,500 for a July 26, 2001, Howard Stern show that featured discussions "about sexual practices and techniques," as the AP put it. The FCC also proposed to impose multiple fines for incidents of alleged indecency in a single show. One can imagine FCC censors making tick marks to tally each incident. Some commissioners are talking about revoking licenses. That would stop not only indecency but everything else as well.

Broadcasters have begun self-censorship. Clear Channel Communications got the ball rolling when it banned Stern's show for six stations. According to The Fresno Bee, some radio and TV stations are rejecting "commer- cials for products that might be considered offensive—dating services, telephone chat lines and sexual performance enhancers, for example..." None of those products are obviously "unfit for the broadcasting industry." Stern's plugs across its entire network. Stern's rants daily against President Bush, based on his "opportunity." Capitalism And Unemployment

1.25

The FCC has landed it in hot water with that element that has appointed itself the watchdog of public morality.

...What Is Socialism?

(Continued from page 4)

Industrial Union organizations to unite all workers in a mass movement to make the promise of socialism a reality. You are needed in the ranks of Socialists fighting for socialist freedom requires enormous efforts of organizational and educational activity. That is why you are needed to approve.

Clear Channel's tolerance for "Free Enterprisers" is not fit for the broadcasting industry to impose on a long-suffering public seemingly began when rock singer Bono uttered an expletive during the 2003 Golden Globe Awards. Janet Jackson's exposure during half-time entertainment during the 2003 Super Bowl, and even theological expression have been censored by secular and religious authorities who want to perceive they are but puppets. The ruling class is not made up of one man or one woman, or even one family, and it is not all in the same business. Apart from the "big boys"—the "giants" of the industry—there are "hyenas," "jackals" and "weasels" on the prowl for opportunities of their own. Those in the "religious" business, for example, have their own customers to satisfy. Some in this line of business use the First Amendment to rail against those who use it in ways their flocks are admonished not to approve.

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Workers should remember the record of the economists when they assess the shills of gloe among economists and other ruling-class sceptics that began April 2. the day March figures on job losses were released. “U.S. Job Growth Slow,” cried a headline on CNN’s Web site. “Labor markets have finally turned the corner,” said Richard Berner, Morgan Stanley’s chief economist. “It’s the real deal.” It is the real deal, said McCoy Levy, chief economist at Banc of America Securities. “There are very few gray clouds.”

Think there’s any reason to believe such obvious cheerleaders for capitalism—day one down in the dumps and ready to throw their models on the scrap heap and the next day doing splits in the air and excitibly shaking the pom-poms to rally “consumer confidence”? Think again.

Has anyone noticed any mention of the UNEMPLOYMENT RATES in all the cheerleading? Conveniently missing from many of the reports in the major media is much discussion of the way the unemployment rate is currently taking a back seat to “job growth” figures. The official unemployment rate for March actually rose a tenth of a percent to 5.7 percent. But that figure was difficult to see anything wrong in through the wash of pom-poms and split screen
dumps and ready to throw their models on the scrap heap. The real unemployment rate is actually much higher. As Daniel Gross observed earlier this year on MSN’s “Moneybox” Web site, for example, “in December 2003, the [rarely reported] adjusted unemployment rate was 9.9 percent, compared with 5.7 percent for the commonly reported “official” unemployment rate.” “In other words,” Gross continued, “on top of the 5.7 percent of the labor force who had jobs there weren’t any jobs for the 4.2 percent of the labor force that was unemployed— that’s a high figure by recent historical standards.”

So high, Gross contends, that it has economists and other pillars of the capitalist community pushing out of the way the traditional measure of unemployment, the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Household Survey, which “determines how many people are working and gives us the unemployment rate,” in favor of its Establishment Survey, which “gathers data directly from 400,000 companies and then estimates how many Americans have payroll jobs.”

The Bush campaign and many other ruling-class elements in the coming months will no doubt favor reporting the condition of the working class by tracking how many workers have jobs instead of how many do not. What any workers not likely to find favor with this further descent into official absurdity are the long-term unemployed.

According to the EPI’s Issue Brief #198, issued March 2004, 22.7 percent of the unemployed were out of work for more than six months...Long-term unemployment has persisted longer in this postrecessionary period than during any similar period in the past 30 years.” Many of the jobs these workers lost are never coming back, and most of the jobs now being generated by the economy, according to EPI figures, pay an average of 40 percent less than the jobs in shrinking industries.

If the working class needs to know most about unemployment and the recurring economic crises that periodically and ever more massively accelerate the tendency of capitalism to throw workers out of the process of production is that the only reason unemployment exists today is that we live in an economic system that operates on the basis of competition and production for private profit.

This system of production, called capitalism, puts control of the economy into the hands of a small minority class that owns the means of life built by the majority working class. Learn more about capitalism and the Socialist Labor Party’s program to abolish it and establish a democratic, socialist economy under the carpet. The misery involves too many. But under which unemployment and poverty will no longer exist. Order our pamphlet Capitalism and Unemployment today!
California

Plant meetings—Section San Francisco will hold the following discussion meetings. For more information please call 408-280-7266 or e-mail slipstalknetscape.net.

Campbell: Saturday, May 15, from 10-11:30 a.m., Community Room, Campbell Public Library, 77 Harrison St., Campbell 95008, tel: 408-374-3118. Moderator: Bruce Cozzini.

San Francisco: Saturday, May 22, from 1:30-4 p.m., at the San Francisco Main Public Library, ground floor conference room, Grove & Larkin sts. Moderator: Robert Bills.

Ohio

Discussion Meetings—Section Cleveland has scheduled the following discussion meetings. For more information please call 440-953-7893.

Independence: May 9, 1:30 p.m., Independence Public Library, Meeting Room 1, 6361 Selig Dr. (Off Rt. 21 [Brecksville Rd.], between Chestnut & Hilside).

Columbus: Sunday, June 20, 1–3 p.m., Columbus Public Library, #3 Conference Room, 96 S. Grant (at Oak Street).

North Royalton: Sunday, June 27, 1:30 p.m., at the home of P. Burns, 8626 York Rd.

Oregon

Portland: Discussion Meetings—Section Portland holds discussion meetings every second Saturday of each month in Portland, Oregon, usually held at the Central Library, but the exact time varies. For more information please call Sid at 503-226-2881 or visit our Web site at http://slp.pdx.home.mindspring.com.

Texas

Houston: Discussion Meeting—Section Houston will hold a discussion meeting on Saturday, May 15, at 1 p.m., at the Heights Branch of the Houston Public Library, upstairs conference room, 4100 Montrose St. Topic: “Stripped of class consciousness, we are invited to...”

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Texas Houston

Identity

(Continued from page 8)

of commerce Youth movement between the partnership of capital and labor.

Our educational system denies classconsciousness to young workers and even invites them to be a part of it. As James W. Elam recently stated, “I am not an individual, I am a part of a class.” So are you?

Critical viewing of television and films reveals that our individualism, or lack of it, is taught at an early age. Social, class, ‘social stratification, ‘class structure, ‘income distribution,’ ‘inequality’ or any conceivable related topic. Not one book lists “upper class,” “working class” or “lower class.”

The tendency of teachers and textbook is toward “class social as if it were a dirty little secret only reinforces the reductiveness of the system. ’

Popular culture, so-called, is another culprit. A critical viewing of television and films reveals that members of the working class are commonly depicted as hoarders, crude louts. A 2003 issue of Newsweek carried an article about how certain celebrities and models enjoy wearing ball caps with some company logo on the front. But watch out, the writer warned, if you are not one of the beautiful people someone might think you’re a real trucker! And the offensive, derogatory, exploiting Jimmy Jones once did a show entitled “blue-collar collaborators.”

We who have classconsciousness must always remember that all news and entertainment is corporate. Every TV show or magazine bombard us with bourgeois ideology. Michael Parenti, in Dirty Truths, says that workers in TV and films are typically seen as a vacuous, phallic, ‘simple-hearted and simple-minded, incapable of leadership or collective action’ so that “it is individual heroes rather than collective action that save the day.”

Dominant values are another tool used to prevent this. The American value of extreme or rugged individualism, for example, is a barrier to classconsciousness. We are urged, beginning in childhood, to “be self sufficient,” to rise above personal limitations, and even to overcome external barriers such as poverty or racism. The Chamber of Commerce, in its “China” report, looks beyond racial divisions to economics: “I believe that there will be a clash between those who want to continue the system of exploitation. I believe there will be that kind of clash, but I don’t think it will be based on the color of the skin....”

For example, does nothing to challenge the economic injustices inherent to the capitalist system. The entrepreneurial and individualistic ethos of capitalism encourages workers to compete rather than cooperate, to advance themselves and advance self and leave comrades behind.

Classconsciousness is strength, dignity and awareness. It is more profound and fundamental than racial identity.

Multiculturalism, for example, popular among educators, does nothing to challenge the economic injustices inherent to the capitalist system. Malex, which looked beyond racial divisions to economics: “I believe that there will be a clash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the system of exploitation. I believe there will be that kind of clash, but I don’t think it will be based on the color of the skin....”

And poet Langston Hughes wrote: “Rubber Soul! The Black And White World Shall be one. The Workers World! The past is done! A new dream flames Against the Sun!”

But, racism, racial identity is a beautiful thing to be celebrated but something even more beautiful is worker solidarity, a united working class—male and female workers of every race, every age, every skin color, yellow and red; intellectual and physical toilers— who stand together against capitalist exploitation. Indeed, classconsciousness is the thing the exploiters fear the most.

letters to the People

The People—1

To the People—1

I want to thank you for the March–April issue of The People. I thought so many of the articles were insightful and thought provoking.

I found the De Leon editorial “Property and Property” and the article about China acknowledging private property very helpful. I recently read Capitalism and Freedom by Milton Friedman. Friedman argues that under capitalism people must have the private property to have economic freedom—something socialism lacks he claims. He propagates this notion that under socialism all of your personal belongings would be stripped away and that only under capitalism—where people are free to do anything and everything—are people truly free. The De Leon editorial explains, however, that there is private property for personal belongings under socialism, but it is the means of production that is owned by the workers. The idea of all the workers owning the means of production (rather than a wealthy few individuals) sounds like a much more free and just society to me. And no one is going to take away your grandmother’s rocking chair, so relax.

I also want to thank you for exposing the fact that globalization is benefiting executives and shareholders at the cost of the workers in “What Will Globalization Mean for Silicon Valley Workers?” I had been following Thomas Friedman’s Op-Eds in the New York Times on globalization, but found that like many of the executives in the Mercury News article you discuss, argues that in the end U.S. companies will make more money as a result of export jobs to countries with low-wage workers. He argues that this extra profit will somehow produce more U.S. jobs, but, of course, he provides no explanation as to how. No, he only states that there will be higher unemployment, lower wages for U.S. workers, and higher profits for executives and shareholders. In other words, globalization will create even greater class separation.

Troy Phipps
Brooklyn, N.Y.

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Troy Phipps
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Safeway Strike

I read with interest the article about the UFCW strike at Safeway in the March–April 2004 issue of The People. As a former UFCW member and labor activist, I have to agree with your assessment of how the UFCW let its members down. I’d even like to go far as point out some other instances of the UFCW’s abysmal behavior.

1. The 1985 Hormel strike, which despite enjoying mass support, was undermined by the UFCW who essentially used union workers to break a strike. There’s at least one book on it, Hard Pressed in the Heartland, which I recommend.

2. The 2001 Pepsi strike in New Jersey, when Teamsters Members of a rank-and-file UFCW members objected to selling or stockin Pepsi products, but were instructed that since they weren’t on strike the UFCW would not support them in any refusals. We were then instructed to sit idly by while management blocked Teamsters from distributing informational fliers in front of the store. A lot of independent actions went on there, and I was pretty proud of folks—in one instance a rank-and-file UFCW member on break saw management telling a Teamster to leave, so he took the fliers from the Teamster and started handing them out himself. Others who worked fountain soda machines (which served Pepsi products) would talk customers into buying the (cheaper) cans of store soda instead.

3. The last example actually provided me with a lot of hope for the future of industrial unionism—many of the workers were shocked to find out that they could not support their fellow workers. Indeed, many of the Teamster members who went on strike had been following Thomas Friedman’s Op-Eds in the San Francisco Mercury News and Globalization, but considered that like many of the executives in the Mercury News article you discuss, argues that in the end U.S. companies will make more money as a result of export jobs to countries with low-wage workers. He argues that this extra profit will somehow produce more U.S. jobs, but, of course, he provides no explanation as to how. No, he only states that there will be higher unemployment, lower wages for U.S. workers, and higher profits for executives and shareholders. In other words, globalization will create even greater class separation.

Troy Phipps
Brooklyn, N.Y.

The SLP

Thanks for all your work. Nobody tells it like it is like the SLP.

Joe Barsch
Aurora, Colo.

The People—2

As always, thank you so much for your publica-

tion. Your tireless work to put together an issue, and all that entails, is much appreciated. Diane Poole
Monessen, Pa.
North Carolina Acquittal Points Up Danger of Capital Punishment

By Paul D. Lawrence

The death penalty is an abomination. It is a barbaric relic of the past. Most advances in thought and science have not advanced, and some not so advanced, have abolished it. Some even refuse to extradite suspects who could face execution in the United States. In retaining capital punishment, the U.S. ruling class finds itself in the company of the crowned heads of Saudi Arabia, the despots of Beijing and the zealots of Tehran.

In February, Alan Gell was acquitted of murder in North Carolina. He had previously spent nearly a decade on death row after being convicted of the same murder. His acquittal resulted largely because prosecutors in “conservative” counties seek and win capital convictions more often.

Members of one very tiny minority are virtually absent from death rows—capitalists. The late Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas (1898–1980) once observed: “One searches our chronicles in vain for the execution of any member of the affluent strata of our society.”

Obviously, death is final. Some innocents have almost certainly been executed. However, thorough investigations of that would undermine capitalist “justice.” Efforts to short-circuit justice systems for accused killers.

On one hand, death penalty proponents often argue that it deters crime. On the other hand, death is no deterrent. Even the worst criminals have no regard for life. Capital punishment is generally rationalized on two grounds, deterrence and punishment.

Marx dismissed the death penalty as “only a metaphysical solution of the old jur [sic] talionis: eye against eye, tooth against tooth, blood against blood.” It is the barbaric practice of blood revenge conducted in a tidier manner by the political state.

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Identity Theft on a Mass Basis

By Michael James

There is a lot of talk these days about identity theft. There is, however, a terrible silence about one of the most systematic, thorough and tragic cases of identity theft in American history: the systematic robbery of a huge segment of the American working class.

This sweeping identity theft is a profound and subtle process. Most members of the working class do not realize they have been robbed. They become class-unconscious, as Daniel De Leon said, without suspecting they have been denied the most essential aspect of their identity. Yet, class is arguably the most fundamental element of identity because, as Marx taught, we are material creatures with primary needs for food, water, clothing, shelter, safety, security and belonging. Our class is determined by our relationship to the means of production or the means of life.

Most of us in capitalist society, whether we are black or white, gay or straight, male or female, are not owners of the means of production. Most of us survive by selling our physical or intellectual labor power. We survive and perhaps even prosper somewhat, so long as we can successfully market our sweat.

Where does this identity theft begin? It begins in childhood where schools are a huge part of the problem. History and the social sciences, for example, routinely deny a working-class perspective to children. There is a pretense of neutrality in education, but this is a myth and a bias in itself. Paulo Freire, in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed, wrote that every textbook and curriculum must invite students to question and resist the prevailing economic system.

Textbooks and teachers hardly present the glory of labor, the primacy of labor and the bourgeoisie as the one in which capitalism causes the conditions that breed crime and violence. Bourgeois law does not deter crime and violence. It upholds the capitalists’ right to rob the working-class majority of the greater share of the wealth produced by workers’ labor.

Because of that private ownership of production and ruthless exploitation, there are each year millions of deaths, injuries and slow poisonings at workplaces and from environmental pollution and defective consumer products. But that state of society remains socially operated means of production and distribution. It upholds the capitalists’ right to rob the working-class majority of the greater share of the wealth produced by workers’ labor.

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Textbooks and teachers hardly present the glory of labor, the primacy of labor and the Marxist reality that only labor can create wealth. More typically, we are academically misguided with the propagandistic, Chamber of