The Public, a project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, is an independent, collectively-run, community-oriented publication that provides a forum for topics underreported and voices underrepresented in the dominant media. All contributors to the paper are volunteers. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to submit articles or story ideas to the editorial collective. We prefer, but do not necessarily restrict ourselves to, articles on issues of local impact written by authors with local ties.

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Champaign, A City With NO SOUL

By Tom Royer

I RECENTLY RECEIVED A LESSON in Champaign City Government 101. On August 13 the Safe Haven Tent City came to St. Mary at my invitation. It was a simple act of kindness for the homeless: they could pitch their tents on our parish property. It was a minimum of hospitality. The neighbors would not complain, as had been the case when they were camped at the Catholic Worker House on Randolph Street. At St. Mary I am the only neighbor and I am not complaining.

But the city official in charge of the zoning code would have none of it. He said we must evict the homeless because their tents were in violation of a city code. If I did not, the city would slap us with fines up to $750 per day for each day the violation continues.

I responded with a letter noting that at St. Mary we were following another and more important code. It is the code found in the sacred scriptures of many different and varied faiths. It is this: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This is spelled out in my religious tradition in the "works of mercy." Giving shelter to the homeless is a work of mercy. The city wants to interfere with my parishioners' practice of religion on our church property. In offering simple hospitality to the homeless, we wish to reverence the humanity of those without a safe place to sleep. The human person is of greater importance than the city code.

In addition I noted that "under Illinois Religious Freedom Restoration Act Illinois municipalities are prohibited from enforcing their zoning laws which impose a substantial burden upon religious institutions and their exercise of religion." The city's response to this was: that a challenge to their application of the city code would have to be addressed in court.

The result has been that the illegal tents have been removed and our guests have been sleeping on the floor in the parish center. In this case bringing indoors is not necessarily an improvement. Having fifteen to twenty people sleeping in one large room offers no privacy. At least tents provide privacy and a place to stash one's gear.

But at present there is a measure of safety, a most important issue for the homeless. I think there is some benefit to me to have been bullied by the city officials about the tents. It is a small experience of the way that the poor endure insult and injury, even great harm, by official policies day in and day out.

In a recent op-ed piece in the New York Times, Barbara Ehrenreich writes that it is almost illegal to be poor. She notes that "city officials boast that there is nothing discriminatory about the ordinances that afflict the destitute" when they are caught engaging in the ordinary "necessities of life, like sitting, lying down, or sleeping." She concludes that "in defiance of all reason and compassion, the criminalization of poverty has actually been intensifying, as the recession generates more poverty."

Whatever legal problems we may have at St. Mary, I suggest that there is a serious problem at city hall. It is a lack of soul. City officials are in denial about the indignity and misery that many local citizens suffer. Responsible city officials should get their heads out of their code books and seek solutions to the very real and increasing problem of homelessness.

Food Not Bombs Returns To C-U With The Really, REALLY Free Market

RFFM will be Saturday, October 10, 3pm-7pm followed by FNB from 5pm-7pm, at the southeast corner of Westside Park in Champaign.

The Really, Really Free Market (RFFM) movement is a non-hierarchical collective of individuals who form a temporary market based on an alternative gift economy. The RFFM movement aims to counteract capitalism in a non-reactive way. It holds as a major goal to build a community based on sharing resources, caring for one another and improving the collective lives of all. Markets often vary in character, but they generally offer both goods and services.

Participants bring unneeded items, food, skills and talents such as entertainment or haircuts. A RFFM may take place in an open community space such as a public park or community commons.

The movement has emerged in diverse places such as: Wilmington, Raleigh, Greensboro and Greensville, NC; New York City, Reno, NV, Cottage Grove, OR; Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Lancaster and Pittsburgh, PA; Austin, Grand Rapids and Detroit, MI; Belfast, NY, Tallahassee, FL; Richmond, VA; Cincinnati and Dayton, OH; Indianapolis, IN; San Francisco... and NOW here in C-U!!

So bring something to share! Anything at all! And then enjoy a free dinner with Food Not Bombs.
On September 21st more than a hundred members of MoveOn and the Campaign for Better Health Care held a vigil at the Champaign County Veterans Memorial in Urbana to push for health care reform. Participants shared their stories of suffering, resulting from the current system to show that people in east central Illinois urgently need a real public health insurance option. More than three hundred similar vigils were held nationwide the same day.

Jim Duffett of the Campaign for Better Health Care noted that in many areas of the country there are just two health insurance companies to choose from. In these places, without the creation of a public health insurance option, there is no way to inspire meaningful competition that has any chance of translating into improved options for consumers. Health care reform that includes a strong public health insurance option will help lower skyrocketing health care costs and expand coverage to millions of Americans.

The demonstration at the County Courthouse.

The public sector actually provides health care more efficiently than the private sector. Medicare administrative costs are equal to about 2 percent of what it pays out to providers. For private insurers the ratio of expenses to payments is typically over 15 percent. Currently the government pays for about half of the country’s health care—almost all of which is actually provided by the private sector—through programs like Medicare and Medicaid. On September 9th, President Obama addressed a joint session of Congress on the Administration’s proposal for health care reform. President Obama’s plan would offer a public health insurance option to provide those currently uninsured and those who can’t afford affordable coverage with a real choice. It appears that inclusion of this public health insurance option is like offering Medicare to everyone who wants it. And a proposed amendment by Representative Dennis Kucinich, supported by many Democrats and some Republicans, would allow individual states to go further and create their own systems of public health insurance for all.

President Obama’s plan would also ban insurance companies from excluding people from coverage based on “pre-existing conditions”, prohibit companies from dropping coverage that has already been purchased when people are sick; cap out-of-pocket expenses; eliminate extra charges for preventive care; ban insurance companies from charging higher premiums to women; and eliminate the “donut-hole” gap in coverage for prescription drugs.

The President’s plan is outlined here: www.whitehouse.gov/issues/health_care/plan/.

Many of us would prefer a simpler solution than the President’s plan-Medicare for All. The existing Medicare program itself is a public health insurance system. Medicare is universal in who it covers, it includes every American over the age of 65. The simplest solution to providing affordable, quality health insurance to every American would be to drop the age restriction on Medicare and extend it to all Americans. Unfortunately, most people who work on health insurance reform don’t see Medicare for All as politically achievable right now.

Every day that we want to pass health care reform with a public option, more people in Illinois are denied life-saving medical treatment, dropped from their insurance coverage, or buried under medical bills.


On Tuesday, September 10, 2009, I attend- ed a Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC) community meeting to examine issues being raised around health reform and to consider what it means in Champaign-Urbana. We were welcomed by CCHCC Board Chair, Lisa Dixon, and information presented included the following:

• National Health Care Crisis Overview: Yadira Montoya, CCHCC Outreach Coordinator
• Local Perspective on the Uninsured: Al Mytty, Director of Payer Contracting, Carle
• Health Insurance Basics and CCHCC Health Reform Analysis & Principles: John Ramsbottom, CCHCC Health Care Access Task Force
• National Health Reform and Medicare: Anne Gargano, CCHCC Medicare Task Force Organizer
• Brief Overview of Legislative Process: Nick Gainer, CCHCC Health Care Access Task Force
• Single-Payer Health Reform Legislation: Dr. Anne Scheetz, Co-chair, Illi- nois Single-Payer Coalition & Member of the National Health Program
• America’s Affordable Health Choices Act and Other Health Reform Bills: Claudia Lenhoff, CCHCC Executive Director
• Opportunities for Action Now: Gainer
• Question & Answer
• Wrap-up and Take Action: Lenhoff

At the start of the meeting, the Champaign library auditorium was filled with around 100 or so people, others stood by in the hall. Interestingly, the majority of atten- dants appeared to be over the age of fifty and were balanced closely between women and men. It seemed likely to me that the vast majority present currently had health cover- age, many through Medicare.

Several presentations focused on clarify- ing our current situation nationally and locally. The gaps in coverage under existing plans and the costs of the lives of those who have no coverage were brought home with num- bers and, chillingly, in Lenhoff’s statement that, “we have had clients die due to lack of access to care.” Ramsbottom, pointed out that, “unless we get an itemized bill directly from the medical facility, the [majority of individual]s don’t really know what these ser- vices actually cost.” If knowledge is power, then this gap represents a significant imbal- ance in individuals’ ability to make decisions about their medical care. This leaves us with a system riddled with opportunities for privi- leging profit over people and reduced oppor- tunities for accountability.

Dr. Scheetz emphasized that, “Medicare is a single payer, government run program” and argued that significant health care reform could be accomplished simply by expanding what is actually covered under the program and by removing the age requirement for participation. The presentation from Scheetz was perhaps the most overtly passionate of the evening. She argued for Medicare for all not simply on the basis of its inherent justice in its uni- versity, but also for the efficiency of such a system. Sharing her own experiences as a physician, she argued that she has much more freedom and discretion to act in the best interests of her patients under Medicare because “I don’t have to call any- body up to get permission or beg to get something covered.” Completing her pre- sentation, Scheetz repeated call for Medicare for all was applause.

Speakers were up-front about their own opinions and worked to present all sides fairly by referring directly to documented information on the various options. The favored option across all the speakers was offering Medicare for all; however, they maintained a commitment to presenting multiple perspectives by addressing the specific representations of current House and Senate legislative proposals.

As is perhaps typical of community information events, media coverage was high at the beginning. There were Two cam- eras operators with large video cameras, one with a big still camera, and two using small- er video cams. After about twenty-five min- utes, there were only the small video camera operators, and after an hour, the CCHCC operator remained. The audience itself was rapt throughout the presentations and speakers answered a variety of questions from the group. As time ran down, Gainer gave information about how to get involved.

Get Involved with the Public i

You don’t need a degree in journalism to be a citizen journalist. We are all experts in something, and we have the ability to share our information and knowledge with others. The Public i is always looking for writers and story ideas. We invite you to submit ideas or proposals during our weekly meetings (Thursdays at 5:30pm at the UCIMC), or to contact one of the editors.
Pressure on University of Illinois Chancellor Richard Herman and President B. Joseph White to resign over the ongoing admissions scandal reached new heights on September 14 as the Urbana-Champaign Senate, primarily a faculty body, passed a resolution by the overwhelming majority of 39 votes against "token, time transients” in both the positions of Chancellor and President of the university. Earlier in the month, Governor Pat Quinn had replaced all but three members of the Board of Trustees. All but two members had resigned, while another was reappointed after offering his resignation.

Last spring the University of Illinois became a symbol for the worst of our state’s corruption when the Chicago Tribune revealed that top university officials and trustees had intervened in the admissions process on behalf of students from families with connections to high-ranking political officials. The practice was widespread that the university created a separate pool of applicants, dubbed “Category 1,” for prospective students from those families. In 2008–2009, half of the 616 Illinois residents who were placed on the clout list over the terms of a new contract since April 21.

By Rich Potter

GEO Struggles For A Living Wage And The Future

Rich Potter is a doctoral candidate in the Institution of Communications Research at UIUC. He is currently the instructor of a course in International Communications and a member of the GEO.

While the ongoing admissions scandal at UIUC has brought mainstream attention to the administration’s mis-placed priorities, labor activists have long been familiar with the contradictions. It doesn’t surprise Peter Campbell therefor, to know that the Chancellor approved using $500,000 of discretionary funds to provide scholarships so that twenty-four well-connected but mediocre and undeserving students could attend the law school. “The administration might have chosen to improve wages, contribute more to health care, or expand childcare options. Instead, they extended privileges and considerable financial resources to the politically well-connected. And now they’re spending half a million dollars in legal fees to deal with the blowback.” Campbell, a Teaching Assistant in the department of Communications and the Communications Officer of the Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO), spoke during the GEO’s Rally for a Living Wage on September 9th.

The GEO, which represents over 2,700 Teaching and Graduate Assistants (TAs and GAs) at UIUC, has been organizing and mobilizing for a fair contract since August 15th, negotiations have not accelerated. In fact, the GEO asked for the federal mediator to reopen for their most recent negotiation session. Nonetheless, GEO members are certain that the only way to get justice at the table is to organize and mobilize on campus. Hence the Rally for a Living Wage, which brought out over 250 students, faculty support, and fellow labor activists from allied campus unions.

The focus on living wages stems from a major discrepancy between the administration’s rhetoric and policy. The Office of Student Financial Aid estimates that the average graduate assistant at UIUC makes less than the minimum living wage. Furthermore, while the living figure doesn’t include over $1,000 of fees and health insurance costs. Since the minimum salary for a TA or GA working a 50 percent appointment is $13,430,* many graduate students are almost $4,000,000,000, which the GEO’s summer housing program.

GEO members, however, are not organizing strictly out of self interest. “We’re very aware that we’re not alone in this fight. All workers deserve a living wage and decent benefits. We certainly hope that the awareness we raise and whatever gains we achieve will benefit our allies in the Campus Labor Coalition,” said campbell.

Meanwhile, a recession in which more working families are struggling to pay for college education, the University of Illinois denied a record $130,000 financial aid applications for the 2008–2009 term. And because of budget cuts, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is telling recipients of the Monetary Assistance Program (MAP), the largest financial aid program in the state, which serves more than 12 percent of Illinois students, to expect just half of their funding in Fall 2008 and none of it in Spring 2009. Furthermore, while affirmative action is alive and well for the elite, African-Americans and Latinos remain underrepresented in the student body, comprising just 12 percent of the campus in a state where African-Americans and Latinos represent more than 29 percent of the overall population.

African-Americans and legislators who appropriate state budgets refuse to treat the University of Illinois as the public institution it purports to be, not all students respond to the GEO’s challenge. Members of the GEO are fighting for a fair contract. On September 9, in addition to the Quad, rally for a fair contract outside the Levis Faculty Center.

*University assistantships are classified according to the number of hours worked. A 50 percent appointment corresponds to 20 hours of work per week and is the most common level of appointment. Workers in some departments, however, are granted only 25 or 33 percent appointments.

Clout And The Fight For A Real Public University

By Julien Rall
Af-Pak Escalation Not The Change We Need

By Paul Mueth

The complexity of the region affords great cover for ongoing misrepresentation by the administration, representatives, think tanks, and the media. All spin, “simply” and generally distort the war on terror/al-Qaeda as currently conducted mainly in Afghanistan/Pakistan. Unsolved colonial borders that divide the Pashtun peoples are part of the legacy of previous British occupation. Divide and conquer colonial policies, historic trade routes and other factors have produced a region composed of Pashtuns, Uzbekis, Tajiks, and many more, speaking a mix of languages (Dari, an Iranian tongue is 2nd to Pashto, though bi and tri lingualism is not uncommon) that overlap and coincide in a kaleidoscopic tapestry. A large part of the problem was recent recognition of facts that were not permitted together as Taliban is arguably rooted in the disenfranchisement of mainly Pashtuns on both sides of the border, the Durand line drawn by the U.K., apparently with a 100 year expiration clause.

Occasionally something clear and frank is blurted out. Chomsky In a recent address at United Nations General Assembly Thematic Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) cites then Secretary-General Jaap Schieffer, informing a NATO meeting in June 2007 that “NATO troops have to guard pipelines that transport oil and gas that is directed for the West,” and more generally have to protect sea routes used by tankers and other “crucial infrastructure” of the energy system. Tarq Ali in a monograph titled Mitrage of a Good War (also a chapter in his latest books) writes, regarding another talk by Schieffer, “That Washington is not seeking permanent bases in this fraught and inhospitable terrain simply for the sake of US actions on the ground. Afghan women rebuilding were awarded to some of the same companies that had built the destroyed buildings in the first place. This rebuilding was a further illustration of this tactic.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE REGION affords great cover for ongoing misrepresentation by the administration, representatives, think tanks, and the media. All spin, “simply” and generally distort the war on terror/al-Qaeda as currently conducted mainly in Afghanistan/Pakistan. Unsolved colonial borders that divide the Pashtun peoples are part of the legacy of previous British occupation. Divide and conquer colonial policies, historic trade routes and other factors have produced a region composed of Pashtuns, Uzbekis, Tajiks, and many more, speaking a mix of languages (Dari, an Iranian tongue is 2nd to Pashto, though bi and tri lingualism is not uncommon) that overlap and coincide in a kaleidoscopic tapestry. A large part of the problem was recent recognition of facts that were not permitted together as Taliban is arguably rooted in the disenfranchisement of mainly Pashtuns on both sides of the border, the Durand line drawn by the U.K., apparently with a 100 year expiration clause.

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THE 'TERROR' LINE REVISITED

Junior partner to the US imperial project, Schieffer, has been replaced by a Dane, Rasmussen, who might stick to the more 'legitimizing' canons of the US/NATO project.

He has repeated the Schieffer line about preventing the region from becoming “grand central station for terrorism.” The global war on terror frame has never been popular with the European publics and many in the leadership, not that they want any bahnhof for al-Qaeda to be unsurveilled and unchecked.

The Obama administration on the record disdains the Global War on Terror (GWOT) frame, preferring Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO) as its euphemism for covert and overt actions abroad. Recently counter-terrorism Chief, John Brennan, a top CIA aide to George Tenet during most of the Bush administration, has announced a “global war on al-Qaeda” as its war. However, the rhetorical drumbeat of the al-Qaeda role continues and, worse, the conflation of it with all the various Taliban and other groups in the region has escalated.

Liberal Democratic support for the war in Afghanistan, though eroding of late, has repressed the Bush administration's invocation of women’s rights as a justification for the US actions on the ground. Afghan women's organizations,
ONCE AGAIN, RACIAL PROFILING NUMBERS were released by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) with no coverage in the local media. When I notified a journalist for the News-Gazette of the latest figures, he told me they covered the story several years ago. Racial profiling is apparently no longer an issue. Yet it became national news this summer when African American Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr was arrested for breaking into his own home. Locally, a young medical student, ‘Toto’ Kaiyewu, was racially profiled by a police officer in nearby Villa Grove, followed, and led on a police chase that ended with police fatally shooting him on L7A.

This is the fifth year that statistics collected by IDOT have shown that minorities in the area are being racially profiled, yet no action has been taken by any of the local police departments. Due to legislation forwarded by then Illinois Senator Barack Obama, police departments throughout the state are now required to record detailed information from routine traffic stops and submit it to IDOT. It is then given to researchers at Northwestern University who compile the statistics and come up with what they call a ‘dispparity index’ indicating where racial profiling occurs. A range of 0-1.1 signifies that minorities and whites are pulled over equally, whereas a range of 1.2-2.5 signifies that minorities are pulled over more than whites.

Perhaps the most alarming information for 2008 shows that the disparity index for the Champaign County Sheriff’s Office jumped to 1.59 in 2008, up from 1.27 in 2007, and 1.02 in 2004 when IDOT began collecting the statistics. Despite efforts to reach him on the phone, Sheriff Daniff said, he told me they covered the story several years ago. Racial profiling is a rampant problem, which the ACLU of Illinois has called for an end to all consent searches among 4 white drivers and 10 minorities—where police ask to search an individual’s vehicle, although minorities are only 30% of the population.

Champaign County Sheriff’s deputies conducted consent searches among 4 white drivers and 10 minorities—9 African Americans and 1 Hispanic. Here, there were more than twice as many minorities searched for contraband. The ACLU of Illinois has called for an end to all consent searches because blacks and Hispanics turn out to be the ones most frequently searched.

Asians, long regarded as the ‘model minority,’ drivers were more likely to be given warning tickets than blacks or Hispanics. Among 631 stops of Asian drivers, the University of Illinois police issued 491 warnings. Both blacks and Hispanics were given citations more than half of the time they were stopped.

The police killing of Toto Kaiyewu on April 6, 2009 raised serious questions about racial profiling. Toto was an African American who was first spotted by police at a Super Pantry in Villa Grove, approximately 15 minutes southeast of Urbana. During an interview with Villa Grove police officer Adam Deckard conducted by Illinois State Police in an investigation that night, he said that he became ‘suspicious’ when he saw a car with Texas plates (Toto was a student in Carbondale, Illinois, but was from Texas). Asked to explain, officer Deckard said, ‘I’m not trying to be prejudiced, but we have a lot of Mexicans in our town. So sometimes we get Texas plates in our town.’ Although Toto was African American, the son of immigrant parents from Nigeria, he was found to be “suspicious” because of the officer’s racist assumptions. There had been recently been large drug busts of Mexican drivers in the surrounding area.

Villa Grove Police Chief Dennis Gite has pointed to IDOT statistics claiming that his police do not racially profile. Indeed, the disparity index for Villa Grove police is only 1.03. Yet Villa Grove was once known as a ‘sundown town’ where for decades blacks were not to be seen after dark. According to the 2000 census, Villa Grove is 98% white. Only 13 minorities were stoped there in 2008. There are simply very few of them in Villa Grove for police to pull over.

Despite the meteoric rise of one-time Illinois Senator Barack Obama, who became the first African American President of the United States, unfortunately the conditions for most blacks throughout the country has not changed. Not everyone can simply share a beer with the police and “agree to disagree,” the conclusion to the Gates scandal which still left the issue unresolved. We can numbers to show racial profiling is a rampant problem, even headlines in the news, but until the people demand more accountability from their police, the slogans of real change ring hollow.

A full report of the 2008 IDOT study can be found online at: www.dot.il.gov/travelstats/ITSS%202008%20Statewide%20and%20Agency%20Reports.pdf

Civil Rights In L’Aquila

Continued from previous page

raised suspicions that cronyism, rather than safety and relief, was the government’s primary concern. The simultaneously angry and resigned mood was intensified by other issues on the national scene. One day during our stay, the papers and web were abuzz with news of a short-lived plan to restore Le Ronde, a kind of civilian guard decked out in uniforms strongly suggestive of fascist militas of the 1930s. Layoffs of tens of thousands of teachers sparked more ire. Two of our hosts, who were involved in the nearly year-long occupation of the University of Genoa, part of a nation-wide occupation and student strike in high schools and universities in protest in response to the layoffs.

And, as in the US, fear-mongering about immigrants and marginalized Italians treated as immigrants is a wide-spread tool used by the right-wing coalition as a wedge issue. The effects of this campaign might be seen in the victories of the Right in the recent European elections.

Our last day in Italy we saw big protest posters appearing in the train stations that depicted the G8 heads of state somewhat squashed by a call (in bold-face type) to keep pressure on them about issues of poverty. Amidst the discouragement we encountered, we also saw many signs of resistance and organization, including among the Artists of L’Aquila—signs that the feeling of “they don’t really care about us” might give rise to transformative political action.

My Quest For A More Informed Future Generation

By Brady Collins

“My Quest For A More Informed Future Generation

By Brady Collins

 Idle hands are the devils playground’, or some ominous saying of that nature, is a good way to begin describing why I started my blog. However, I do not believe in the immoral, physical manifestation of the devil, nor do I consider myself an especially acerbic or patronizing person. What I mean to point out is that I am an adamant believer in civil engagement. I think a pro-active, forward thinking, and socially acerbic or patronizing person. What I mean to point out is that I am an adamant believer in civil engagement. I think a pro-active, forward thinking, and socially

The times are a-changin’ and without an informed democracy we will be robbed of our essential rights, to have our voices heard, and to change the world as we see fit. I write about such matters, from local to international, in hopes of increasing positive discussion on campus and on the net. Sometimes crude, often sarcastic, I infuse the entries with my own self-proclaimed witty commentary. Nevertheless, I always strive to make the subjects of my posts relevant. My intentions are not to spark blind and angry debate, but merely raise issues that deserve open discussion. So leave any ideologies at the door, open your mind, your eyes, and maybe you’ll find something you think is important and perhaps we can change it, together. Here is the link to the blog, which I have cleverly titled. ‘Brady’s Blog’.

http://bradysblogspot.blogspot.com/
Anti-Venezuela Spokespeople Misrepresent Reality Of Press Freedom In Venezuela

By Mark Weisbrot

This column was published by The Guardian Unlimited on August 4, 2009

Update: It appears that the proposed media law referred to in The Guardian debate below is not going anywhere in the Venezuelan Congress, it is not clear that it was ever under serious consideration.

Denis MacShane attacks the British left for defending Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez against an onslaught from the main “new wave of intellectuals,” as if these counsels were to no real effect. Despite Gen. McCrystal protestations to the contrary, his emphasis on military escalation is not going anywhere in the major media in Venezuela. The media there routinely broadcasts reporting and commentary that would not be allowed under FCC rules here. And the vast majority of the media in Venezuela is still controlled by the right-wing opposition. This fact was buried in a footnote in Human Rights Watch’s highly prejudiced and misleading 230 page report on Venezuela. The footnote acknowledge that RCTV, which lost its broadcast license for a long list of offenses that would have landed its owners in jail in the United States, still has a cable audience that is bigger than all of the Venezuelan state television combined.

If the United States had a media like Venezuelab’s, President Obama could never have been elected. Two thirds of the majority of Americans would have believed, as those beholden to some right-wing sources do, that he is a Muslim who was not born in the United States. Think of Fox News and the Washington Times as the vast majority of the U.S. media—that is the reality in Venezuela, only the media is more political and less accurate than our biggest right-wing outlets.

What happens when our major media threatens to step over the line and become a political actor? They almost never do it, but two weeks before the 2004 U.S. presidential election, the Sinclair Broadcast Group of Maryland, which owns the largest chain of TV stations in the U.S., decided to broadcast a film that accused candidate John Kerry of betraying U.S. prisoners in Vietnam.

Nineteen Democratic senators sent a letter to the U.S. FCC demanding that Sinclair’s broadcast license be revoked or not renewed, and that the film be taken off the air. Sinclair backed down and did not broadcast the film.

The Venezuelan media is not so restricted as in the U.S. Of course this is a bad law. There are a number of bad laws on the books in Venezuela, and in fact numerous countries in the region have “desacato” laws which make it a crime to insult the President. But MacShane’s targets—he mentions Ken Livingstone and Richard Corbett—are not support such laws! I would bet serious money that they do not. So his main line of attack is misleading if not downright dishonest.

MacShane also misrepresents the reality of press freedom in Venezuela. In fact, there is a much more oppositional media in Venezuela than in the United States, and a

Af-Pak Escalation NOT The Change We Need

Continued from page 7

such as Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) and Afghan Women’s Mission (AWM) provide an antidote to this rise. Sorai Kalilkhani, co-director of RAWA, and Mariam Rawi, of RAWA, have co-written a critique of the assertion that “the Feminist Major- ity Foundation has lent its good name—and the good name of feminism in general—to advocate for further troop escalation and war.” This important argument is available on AWM’s website, where one can also view the Women of Afghanistan section of Rekthnik Arrman from Robert Greenwald’s Brave New Films.

Despite the complexities and agonies of this area, citizens of the U.S. need to confront the reality of our role in the region. The legacy of past years of real-politick need to be acknowledged. Bin Laden and Hekmatyar were our CIA covert Northern Alliance; long live a free and democratic Afghanistan! Bin Laden and Hekmatyar were our CIA covert Northern Alliance; long live a free and democratic Afghanistan!

Let’s Rise Against the War Crimes of US and Its Fundamentalist Lackeys!

RAWA Statement on Massacre of over 150 civilians in Bala Baluk of Farah Province by the U.S. RABIA, May 7, 2009

“As the US occupies continue killing our innocent and scrupu- lous people without regret, this time they committed yet another horrible crime in Bala Baluk village of Farah Province. On 5th May 2009, the US airstrike targeted people’s homes, selling more than 150, mostly women and children. This is another war crime but Pentagon shamelessly includes Taliban as the perpetrators too and in provoking oppression in providing provocation to continued US-Nato presence.

The only way our people can escape the occupant forces and their obedient servants is to rise against the slogans of: ‘Neither the occupier! Nor the bawal Taliban and the crimi- nal Northern Alliance; long live a free and democratic Afghanistan’!”

Reality Of Press Freedom In Venezuela

Unit One Guest-in Residence Brian Tokar September 27–October 1

Brian Tokar is acclaimed as a passionate advocate of grassroots action for global justice and an ecological future. He has been an activist, author and a prominent voice on environmental issues since the 1970s. He is the author of The Green Alternative and Earth for Sale, edited two books on the politics of biotech- nology, Redesigning Life?, and Gene Traders, and co-edited the forthcoming collection, Crisis in Food and Agriculture: Conflict, Resistance and Renewal. Tokar’s articles on environmental issues, emerging ecological movements, global warming, and genetic engineering appear regularly in 2 Magazine, Synthesis/Regenera- tion, Toward Freedom, Counterpunch.org and many other publications and websites.

Tokar holds concurrent degrees from MIT in biolo- gy and physics, and a Masters degree in biophysics from Harvard University. He is the Director of Vermont’s Institute for Social Ecology. He has lectured throughout the U.S. and internationally, on ecological issues and movements.

“The guests of this program live in Allen Hall, and, in cooperation with students and staff, attempt to elicit an understanding for the necessity of creative thinking in society. All events are open to the public.
IN THE PAST MONTHS, the American print media stories and the talking head punditocracy have discussed the status of sports in Iraq. The Iraqi National Soccer Team played their first home games since prior to the United States invasion. Iraq shut out Palestine 3-0 in the World Cup qualifier and shutout Palestine again in Baghdad. Iraq received even more positive news when they were told that the Kurdish self-governing region of Iraqi Kurdistan could begin hosting matches in the Asian Football Federation. Prior to the July 2009 Olympics, Iraq was forced to play their ‘home’ games in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan, Beirut and Oman that wreaked havoc on training and maintaining a fully professional soccer schedule.

The media reports have been glowing dispatches about the success of ‘the surge’, the US counterinsurgency strategy of embedding US military units in Iraq and securing control of their country after Obama’s orders to ‘hand over control’. However, this is not the first time that Iraqi sports have been intertwined with US policy to benefit politicians and imperialism.

In August 2004, George W. Bush attempted to use the Iraqi National Soccer Team in electoral campaign advertisements. In response to Bush’s capitalizing on the Iraqis, members of the team were outspoken about being used to justify the violent imperialism perpetrated by the United States. Midfielder Salim Youssif, who would later be brutally tortured by ‘Iraqi as a team does not want to be used by Mr. Bush to use for his presidential campaign. He can find another way to advertise himself’. An anonymous player discussed the violence plaguing Iraq as a result of the invasion, ‘How will [Bush] meet his God having slaughtered so many men and women? He has committed so many crimes.’ Even the head coach of the team at the time, Adnan Hamad publicly said, ‘The American Army has killed so many people in Iraq. What is freedom when I go to the stadium and there are shootings in the road? ’

The ‘shootings in the road’ and ‘slaughter’ did eventually decrease. But, while many mainstream politicians and corporate media outlets have attributed the decreasing violence in Iraq to the ‘surge’, the US counterinsurgency activities, there is an alternative and bloody theory coming from journalists like Patrick Cockburn. Cockburn argues that much of the violence came from sectarian warfare between Sunnis, Shia and Kurds who utilized death squads to create ethnic enclaves within Iraq. As Cockburn wrote in 2006: ‘It is strange to hear George Bush and John Reid deny that a civil war is going on, given that so many bodies—all strangled, shot or hanged solely because of their religious allegiance—are being discovered every day.’ [Later, a group of children playing football in a field noticed a powerful stench. Police opened up a pit which contained the bodies of 27 men, probably all Sunnis, stripped to their underpants; they had all been tortured and shot in the head. The Shia militias and death squads slaughte Sunnis in tit-for-tat killings every time a Shia is killed.’ He continued in June 2009: ‘The Iraqi government announces proudly that in May 2009 only 225 Iraqis died from war-related violence, a lower figure than we have seen in any month for at least four years. Of course this is far better than the 3,000 tortured bodies which used to turn up every month at the height of sectarian war in 2006-7.’

Arguably, the rate of deaths of Iraqis in Iraq has dissipated because the potential victims have already been killed or have fled from the area to avoid being killed. Statistics are somewhat sketchy but approximately 2.4 million people are currently displaced within Iraq and another 2 million are living abroad to escape the violence. The death squads that fomented ethnic violence in Iraq also impacted another sport in Iraq, baseball. The original Iraqi National Baseball team fell apart amidst the bloodshed of sectarian violence. As Laith Hammoudi discussed with some of the players, the fear of reprisal is still apparent. ‘Bashar, 28, is the only non-student on the team. The physical education teacher is captain and asked that his last name not be used because he still fears Sunni retaliation.’

The team had no cleats, three balls, one bat, no jerseys and old gloves. After the story ran, there were many mainstream media calls for aid, most notably from MSNBC’s The Rachel Maddow Show which got a bucket of balls, a rule book, donated fitted jerseys, cleats, bats, gloves and a massive amount of support from the public offering assistance. I wholeheartedly support the assistance to the Iraqi National Baseball team and wish them the best in their upcoming tournament in, of all places, another war torn country.

According to the most recent statistics, Iraq has 28% of its children suffering from chronic malnutrition, homes have limited access to electricity, only 37% have connections to sewer systems and only 22% of the water plants have been fixed to distribute potable water. Iraqis are in dire need of these basics of life much more so than bats and balls. While I applaud the efforts of the Iraqi soccer and baseball teams, it is important to remember that these athletes are playing the game for the love of the sport. They should not be utilized to further paternalistic justifications for imperialism for any administration.