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Talking with Taliban takes center stage

By Susan Webb

Talking with the Taliban emerged as the headline-grabbing themes at two international meetings on Afghanistan last week.

The two meetings were a regional conference of Afghanistan's neighbors and other key countries in Istanbul, Turkey, on Jan. 26, and a higher-profile conference in London on Jan. 28 attended by officials of 70 nations and international organizations such as the United Nations and International Monetary Fund.

At the Istanbul meeting, leading diplomats from China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Britain, the U.S., NATO and the European Union, backed the idea of national conciliation, Reuters reported.

"We reaffirm our strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan," they said in a statement. "We support, therefore, the Afghan national process of reconciliation and reintegration in accordance with the constitution of Afghanistan in a way that is Afghan-led and Afghan-driven."

The London meeting featured talk of international support to bolster the Afghan government, including establishment of a fund to encourage



lower-level Taliban fighters to lay down arms. Afghan President Karzai said his government would provide jobs, land and money for those who give up fighting.

But diplomats and others say involving Taliban leaders is necessary.

Afghan officials say they have been engaged

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in talks with the Taliban, although Taliban statements denied that.

In an effort to promote talks, the UN on Wednesday, the day before the London meeting, removed the names of five former Taliban leaders from the UN terrorism "black list," including the ousted Taliban regime's foreign minister Wakil

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Ahmad Mutawakil, who lives in Kabul.

New York Times reporter Dexter Filkins, writing from Kabul, reports that "American leaders have begun to search for a road that could eventually lead to a political settlement with the Taliban's leaders.

"Afghan leaders and American officials believe that ultimately the two sides will have to reach a political settlement for the fighting to end."

Dr. Ashraf Ghani, the former finance minister of Afghanistan and former candidate in last year's disputed presidential elections, told Al Jazeera on Jan. 30 that reconciliation talks with the Taliban are under way.

Ghani, currently a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington who said he is an adviser to Karzai, told Al Jazeera the Afghan conflict cannot be settled by use of force. "We must put politics first now," he said.

He said there is a need to "differentiate between the Taliban and al-Qaeda - al-Qaeda is the enemy and there must be a united front against it, but the Taliban are a local and national issue" and it is necessary to find ways of "reaching them and bringing them within the fold."

Ghani said Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states

have been active in mediation efforts.

Karzai has asked Saudi Arabia to mediate with the Taliban and said it would host peace talks if the Taliban cuts ties with al-Qaeda, according to Al Jazeera.

Ghani also said, "We also need the engagement of China to make sure that regional arrangements are put in place" to end use of neighboring countries as sanctuary for armed attacks.

However a report by the Chinese news agency Xinhua expressed skepticism that reconciliation efforts would work, given the Karzai government's weakness and the problematic foreign military occupation.

"Afghans see little chance in bringing militants into mainstream of community and convincing them to lay down arms," the Xinhua article said.

"Taliban would not accept any peace plan presented in London as the militants term the international troops deployed in Afghanistan as the occupying force," an Afghan analyst and former Taliban official Waheed Mughda told Xinhua.



Susan Webb is co-editor of the Peoples World

Fight for jobs takes center stage

By PW Editorial Board

The fight for jobs is central to any economic recovery and to any forward motion for a people's agenda. With this in mind, the national board of the Communist Party USA took steps to beef up its work on the economic crisis.

"Labor, civil rights, women, youth and all the progressive core forces in our country are now moving to place the fight for jobs and the unemployed front and center on their agenda," said Sam Webb, chair of the CPUSA, "We have to pay particular attention to the working-class communities hardest hit, especially African American, Latino, and immigrant communities. And unemployment for youth is staggering."

The board hailed the establishment the Jobs for America Now national coalition and the AFL-CIO's five point program for economic recovery and jobs.

"This is exactly the broad national coalition framework needed for this fight," said Scott Marshall, who is heading up the CPUSA's jobs effort.

While most labor and people's forces welcomed President Obama's State of the Union

Speech and its emphasis on jobs, many say it will take more than tax cuts to small businesses to create the millions of jobs necessary.

That's why a grassroots movement is needed now more than ever to win more federal investment in schools, roads and energy systems, aid to state and local governments, government-run jobs program and an extension of jobless benefits.

There are literally thousands of efforts and projects at the grassroots level led by local unions and union unemployed committees, community groups, retiree organizations, churches and central labor councils around the country. These efforts include not only advocacy and legislative efforts, but also food pantries, homeless shelters and job counseling and training efforts.

"Millions are angry and suffering. If we look around in our communities and work places we will find many opportunities to get involved and help build grassroots action and muscle behind the demands of the national coalitions," Marshall said. "We need emergency action now."



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Anti-abortion church accused of child trafficking

By Teresa Albano

An Idaho church associated with right-wing causes and politics was accused of child trafficking. Ten Americans associated with Central Valley Baptist of Meridian, Idaho and the New Life Children's Refuge were caught trying to take 33 Haitian children across the border to the Dominican Republic without the proper authorization.

The BBC reports, "Even before the earthquake, kidnap gangs were estimated to take thousands of children from the slums and streets of the Haitian capital every year.

"But the quake has made the situation even worse. Now there are thousands of new orphans, and thousands more children separated from their families.

"For days rumors swirled of children being picked off the streets and whisked out of the country."

Some of the 33 children are not even orphans, the BBC reports. One little girl said through tears she had parents and thought she was just going to summer camp.

The Idaho Baptist church is associated with many far-right causes including anti-abortion mobilizations. One of the church's leaders, Randy Jackson, protested at the Salt Lake City Olympic Games, against the Red Cross and Planned Parenthood's condom distribution. Jackson also traveled to Washington D.C. to protest the 2004 March For Women's Lives.

The U.S. State Department announced Jan. 26 that both the Haitian and U.S. governments must approve that children are ready to travel.

"The decision to permit the departure of chil-



dren before the full and final completion of adoptions is a serious matter. Both the Haitian and U.S. governments must confirm that each child is appropriately authorized for travel.

"In the aftermath of a crisis such as the Haiti earthquake, children are especially vulnerable; and there is increased potential for abuse of, and trafficking in, children. The United States remains committed to working with the Government of Haiti to implement safeguards to protect children and their families in Haiti."

According to a 2002 UNICEF, Haiti has been battling child trafficking, and the United States and Canada are the main receivers of trafficking from the Caribbean. The United Nations Children and Education Fund also estimates 2.5 million children, a majority of them girls, are sexually exploited in the multi-billion dollar commercial sex industry. NBC reported that an average predator in the U.S. can make more than \$200,000 per year off of one young girl.

The church denies any wrong doing. Central Valley Baptist Pastor Clint Henry told CBS, "I know there has been illegal activity that's been going on down there. It's unfortunate that we would be associated with that."

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LOCAL NEWS

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Fancy suits for some, but workers get shaft

By Rick Nagin

Braving brutal winter winds, workers from the Hugo Boss clothing firm picketed an up-scale suburban mall, asking help to stop the company from closing one of the last remaining domestic clothing plants and moving to Turkey.

Hugo Boss, a German maker of top-of-the-line men's suits and pants, notified its nearly 400 employees over the Christmas holiday that it planned to shut its plant in Brooklyn, a suburb of Cleveland, when the current contract with Workers United expires at the end of April.

The union, part of the Service Employees International Union, has vowed to fight, and set up an informational picket Jan. 28 on the edge of Beachwood Mall in front of Nordstrom's, one of the largest U.S. retailers of Hugo Boss suits.

A delegation went into the store to ask support for the effort. The Rev. Bob Strommen, a leader of Cleveland Jobs with Justice, told the picketers that the delegation got a friendly reception but was referred to Nordstrom's regional office. He said Hugo Boss suits were on sale at the store for \$795.

"The company is not in trouble," she said. "They have never denied the plant is profitable. They just want cheap labor. It's about greed."

The union is appealing to supporters to e-mail Hugo Boss CEO Dr. Andreas Stockert urging that the plant be saved, Andreas_Stockert@hugoboss.com.

¿Éste es un momento socialista?

Por Sam Webb

Éste es un momento socialista? Depende como entendemos un "momento socialista". Si significa que el pueblo norteamericano en su mayoría insiste en una transformación socialista de la sociedad, hay poca evidencia de ese sentido.

La gente está enojada y frustrada; quieren cambio; están listos para luchar por trabajos, cuidado médico, educación pública, ayuda de vivienda y así. ¿Pero están reclamando un cambio de sistema, una sociedad socialista? Todavía no. De decir diferente me parece traído de muy lejos.

Pero, si significara que hay muchas más personas listas para oír más del socialismo, y no rechazarla de antemano, yo diría, "Sí, éste es un momento socialista. Éste no es algo insignificante. No era hace mucho tiempo que el socialismo no tenía mucha aceptación dentro de sectores anchos del pueblo norteamericano. Fue considerado un modelo fallado, no democrático y peor, una idea quebrada - a lo mejor algo dejado en la historia.

De hecho, los ideólogos de capitalismo pensaban que habían sepultado la idea socialista por siempre, pero a su disgusto el genio ha salido de la botella otra vez, gracias en gran medida a las condiciones azotando la economía doméstica y mundial. No es el determinismo económico decir que la fuerza de circunstancias económicas y la crisis de la vida cotidiana para muchas millones están formando y reformando la

conciencia de masas, aunque en maneras contradictorias.

Comunistas y socialistas deben recibir el renacimiento de este diálogo sobre el socialismo y participar con ansia.

Como todo, nuestra visión del socialismo necesita un ajuste a las nuevas condiciones (la crisis económica) y los desafíos (el sostenibilidad económico y del ambiente, el desarme nuclear, la pobreza mundial y la desigualdad) y a la vez examinar la experiencia del socialismo en el siglo XX.

Al fin y al cabo, no hay modelos universales dentro los cuales cabe cada país. La tela de la experiencia socialista es un tejido bonito de muchos colores y hilos, no un gris monótono y pardo. Cada país forma un socialismo que lleva una marca profunda de su propia historia, política, economía y cultura.

Las experiencias de las revoluciones y sociedades socialistas exitosas y no exitosas tienen que ser filtradas a través nuestro contexto nacional. En ninguna manera se puede importarlas en una manera fácil y sin crítica.

Como dije en muchas ocasiones, Gus Hall, el anterior líder del Partido Comunista de los EE.UU., "Somos por un socialismo de la Carta de Derechos", refiriendo a la nuestra Carta de Derechos, la cual en su perspectiva sería preservada y desarrollada en una sociedad socialista en los Estados Unidos.

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