



# Youth and students cut artery to Capitol

by Peter Gilbert, Raleigh FIST

For more than six hours following the Troops Out Now Coalition's march on Sept. 29 to cut off the funds for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, more than 100 youth and students from across the country blockaded Constitution and Pennsylvania avenues, the major roads leading to the Capitol building. They demanded an end to war funding and vowed that if the people's resources continue to be used to wage imperialist war, the government will be prevented from operating.

Youth from as far away as Oregon, Florida and Vermont, and representing chapters of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST), Campus Anti-War Network (CAN), Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and others, together with TONC leaders, united in the streets around a common demand of "Troops Out Now!"

As the march approached its destination at the Capitol building, hundreds of youth ran forward to block Constitution Avenue, and as the main body of the march passed the action many more joined in. Despite the willingness of many of

the youth to risk arrest in order to close access to the Capitol, D.C. police were apparently overwhelmed by the size and militancy of the action.

After holding Constitution for an hour, the youth moved one block to take over the busier intersection where Constitution and Pennsylvania avenues meet. All six lanes of Constitution were blockaded so successfully that youth felt free to dance, string up banners and signs from the traffic lights, and even order pizza.

After several hours it became clear that the police did not have the political will to take back the streets, so youth erected tents and organized themselves into security and logistical teams, preparing for a long stay. Around 10 p.m., after more than six hours, all the activists triumphantly marched back to the Encampment, chanting "Whose streets? Our streets" with a whole new meaning.

On Friday afternoon, in another display of student power, the same youth had taken over the busy D.C. streets in an unpermitted march to unmask the hypocrisy of the government and point out the effects the war has had even on youth at home in the U.S.

Marching first on the Department of Education, they blocked the entrances which ironically proclaim "No child left behind," and demanded money for adequate education and college loans, rather than the

current policy of increasing education costs to force youth into the military.

At the Department of Injustice, Tyneisha Bowens of Raleigh FIST proclaimed the closing of the building, demanding "Free the Cuban Five! Free the Jena Six! Free Mumia Abu-Jamal! Free all political prisoners! No longer will we allow this government to criminalize the resistance. We must have a People's Department of Justice to bring justice to the war criminals in government."

Friday's youth march went next to the local military recruiting station, blocking traffic the whole way, where students blocked the streets, poured into the recruiting station, and used the military's printed lies as confetti. After successfully closing the recruiting station, and announcing the need to instead recruit more youth to the movement, the young revolutionaries turned their attention to the Capitol itself. Arriving at the Capitol with a tail of at least 15 police cars of various departments, the youth made their final stand on the Capitol lawn and tied all their grievances together at the seat of this government.

Both actions reflected a progression from earlier tactics in the youth movement, a move from protest to resistance. In addition to marching and vocalizing their demands, youth showed their ability to actually occupy the oppressive institutions. Due to their high level of discipline, organization and unity, all of the activists were uninjured and avoided arrest, even though they were willing to face these consequences if necessary.

As Bowens summarized, "This was more than a symbolic action of civil disobedience. We actually showed our ability to occupy territory and make it serve our needs, not to oppress us." ■



## Jena 6 highlight right to self-defense (continued)

themselves, the state will seek to crush any inkling of resistance and defense before racist terror. This is so because racism is a weapon of the U.S. capitalist rulers. The virulent ultra-right racists, such as the KKK or Nazi skinheads, are small. It may be difficult to ascertain their actual numbers, but relative to the actual number of people in the United States, their numbers are very small.

Even the Minutemen, racists who have doffed their in number. They have attempted, but failed, to ally themselves with oppressed nationalities who are U.S. citizens against immigrant workers—to divide the unity of the oppressed.

But, as Sam Marcy, the late chair person of Workers World Party, wrote in "The Klan & the Government: Foes or Allies": "The financing and the spread of neo-fascist and downright KKK and Nazi groupings is a logical supplement to the legal repressive and terrorist apparatus of the capitalist state in times of need. For that reason, a short-lived perspective in fighting the fascist menace is erroneous."

Movements don't spring up spontaneously. Marcy also pointed out, "Capitalism is the fountainhead of political reaction in general and of KKK and neo-Nazi terror in particular." Reaction springs from the system itself. While ultra-right groupings may appear to be on the fringe and isolated, they never disappear and are never insignificant under capitalism. Groups like the Minutemen, in seething chauvinist fits, will try to appeal to the masses in an economic downturn, such as is beginning now, but they exist to confuse workers in general, to divide the oppressed from one another, but ultimately to maintain the white supremacist-dominated U.S. capitalist system.

The events in Jena highlight perfectly the racism inherent and endemic to the system. Many have and will continue to try to minimize the impact of hanging

nooses by labeling it as an isolated event or a prank.

Even in defense of the Jena 6, some may say, "It was just a school fight. Why the ridiculous charges against the six young Black men?"

However, it should be stated emphatically that what the Black youths did was self-defense and that it is the right of the oppressed to defend themselves. Demonization of Black youth The state's response is a symptom of the racist in-justice system. This can be seen in the criminalization of the poor, especially people of color. Black people make up half of the more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in U.S. prisons. Add the number of people in jails and on parole or awaiting trial and the number is over 8 million.

Unemployment in the Black community has been consistently in the double digits and in major cities such as New York can be as high as 50 percent for young men in their twenties. The lack of health care, education and other disparities are all glaring in the and similar for all the oppressed.

Black people are vilified and Black men in particular are made society's pariah. These are the conditions the Jena 6—Robert Bailey Jr., 17; Theo Shaw, 17; Carwin Jones, 18; Bryant Purvis, 17; Jessie Rae Beard, 14; and Mychal Bell, 16—lived with at the time of their arrest. When the nooses were hung from the tree, history compounded with the nature of racism today. If Jena was and is not a racist place, as some white residents have claimed—all while avoiding the mass march that symbolized an uprising of Black people across the country in response to the Jena 6 case—then the students responsible would have been dealt with by the white residents in solidarity with the Black residents.

This, however, is not what happened. A series of events occurred, including the light treatment of the white students who hung the nooses; the threat by the district attorney to make the lives of the Black students disappear with the "stroke of his pen"; the beating of Robert Bailey; the pulling of a shotgun on Robert Bailey and two of his friends, and subsequent theft charges after the young men disarmed the white person.

Nothing was done. What were the young men to do in the wake of these attacks and threats? What was left to them in a small town that is more than 85 percent white? When Justin Barker was attacked for jeering Robert Bailey and calling the young men the "n" word, the young men were standing up and defending their fellow students, themselves and the entire Black community.

The response of the local state officials was an assertion that young Black men don't



Bryant Purvis, one of the Jena 6, on Sept 20th

have the right to self-defense—that they should cower and hide, because the officials already showed they would not act to stop the racists.

The Jena 6 are heroes and should be held in that light, as history will attest. Their actions of defense were for the oppressed of Jena, for the people of New Orleans, victims of police brutality and racist terror. Their actions and the reaction of the state have awakened the Black masses and have sparked an emerging uprising across the country.

It is up to the anti-racist, anti-imperialist movement to lift up the Jena 6. Their freedom must be demanded. All charges should be dropped and the D.A. stripped of his position and license to practice law. And the progressive and working-class movements should affirm and support the right of the oppressed to self-defense.

Hales is a member of FIST in Denver, CO. ■

