

Power Cuts to Gaza create Humanitarian Crisis

By David Hoskins

More than 800,000 Palestinians have been living in darkness since Israel forcibly closed the border and blocked fuel shipments into Gaza on Jan. 18, forcing Gaza's only electrical plant to shut down. The general director of Gaza's single electricity plant, Derar Abu Sissi, explained that "the catastrophe will affect hospitals, clinics, water wells, houses, factories, all aspects of life."

Hospital generators are rapidly running out of fuel. Health Ministry official Moaiya Hassannain exclaimed, "We have the choice to either cut electricity on babies in the maternity ward or heart surgery patients or stop operating rooms." (Washington Post, Jan. 22)

Israel sealed off all entrances into Gaza last week, shortly after President Bush's recent trip to the Middle East, and just a week after Bush met with Mahmud Abbas and Ehud Olmert. The blockade was no doubt approved by the Bush administration.

Egypt also shares a border with Gaza. Egypt's reluctance to reopen its border, however, has led many to speculate that the U.S. knew of Israel's plans in advance and Bush used his recent trip to bully other countries into cooperation.

The civilian population of Gaza is being punished because they elected Hamas, a group which is militantly anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist, to run Gaza. This type of collective punishment is a flagrant violation of international law and is in specific breach of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Article 50 of the Hague regulations, and should be protested by progressive people everywhere.

Israel routinely stages assaults on the Palestinian population to try to break its spirit. Despite the blockade and these assaults, the

Palestinian people's popular resistance against Israel's occupation of their homeland continues. Palestinians in Gaza continue to fire Qassam rockets into Israel.

Israel has supplemented the blockade with air strikes and other daily assaults on the Gaza strip. Doctor Fawzy Nabulseyah, director of the intensive care unit at Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital, discussed how the casualties from the air strikes, combined with the severity of fuel shortages, have put the lives of innocent Palestinians in double jeopardy.

"We have 15 patients on breathing machines. If the electricity is cut off they stop working and the patients will die of blood poisoning after about five minutes," he said. "Most of them were wounded in Israeli operations and air strikes." (French Press Agency, Jan. 21)

In a separate incident, forty military tanks entered the Jabalya refugee camp to demolish Palestinian homes. Eighty percent of the people living in Gaza are refugees, and the Israeli government appears determined to destroy those homes too.

The blockade of Gaza has sparked international outrage. Christopher Guinness, spokesman for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, warned that international food aid to Gaza may be suspended due to a shortage of fuel



Members of FIST march in NYC against the Seige on Gaza on January 25 in front of the Israeli Consulate.

and of plastic bags needed to pack food. Guinness pointed out that "The logic of this defies basic humanitarian standards." The UNRWA provides food necessities to 860,000 Palestinians living in Gaza.

British human rights groups have decried the fuel cutoff as unlawful. On Jan. 26 a humanitarian convoy is scheduled to travel from Israel to the Gaza strip to deliver supplies. The convoy will be headed by human rights groups and was decked out in signs demanding that Israel "Lift the Blockade!" (The American Muslim, Jan. 21)

Demonstrations against the blockade have occurred inside Israel. Many merchants in mostly Palestinian east Jerusalem participated in a one-day solidarity strike to protest the blockade.

Amnesty International has called for an immediate lifting of the blockade. AI Middle East and North Africa program director, Malcolm Smart, in an AI news release, pointed out that "More than 40 seriously ill patients have died since the Israeli authorities closed Gaza's borders ... now the entire Gaza population is being put at risk as electricity and fuel supplies run out. This action appears calculated to make an already dire humanitarian situation worse, one in which the most vulnerable—the sick, the elderly, women and children—will bear the brunt."

Hoskins is an organizer with FIST in Washington DC. ■

Behind the Attack on Hip Hop

By Larry Hales, Denver FIST

Hip-hop is still under attack. Popular media outlets have forgiven Don Imus' comments; the sexist and racist radio personality has been given another position on another station to pollute the airwaves. But hip-hop is still heavily scrutinized and made the scapegoat for the sexism, racism and homophobia rampant in the U.S.

Whatever contradictions exist in rap music or any of the other elements of hip-hop, the culture is neither the greatest purveyor of the contradictions nor the initiator. It is merely subject to infiltration from the culture that comes with capitalist society.

Any student of the evolution of Black music knows that in the beginning, hip-hop was not just party music, but social commentary. The phenomenon of what was then known as a counterculture—partly because hip-hop in its early days was underground—was a response to the conditions imposed upon Black and Puerto Rican youth in New York and across the country in inner city areas in the late 1970s and 1980s. Those conditions included white flight from city areas, the beginning of deindustrialization and the decline of the great social movements of the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the boom and bust cycle of capitalism.

If the perpetuation of capital requires greater and greater exploitation, especially of oppressed nationalities, then it is natural for countercultures of the exploited—the oppressed and workers—in bourgeois or capitalist society to exist. The wellspring, in this period, of the countercultures is the desire for freedom from exploitation.

Culture and modes of production

A dialectical materialist conception of history is essential to understanding the development of culture—especially artistic output—in response to productive modes and more so when coming to the defense of an art form of an oppressed nationality in "the prison house of nations," the United States.

Culture is all encompassing. The thoughts, ideas, actions, language, arts—every human endeavor or expres-

sion is connected to a society's culture. It is not something static, but evolves and is intimately bound to the real and material world. Miles Davis perhaps put it best when he said, "Music is always changing. It changes because of the times and the technology that's available."

Just as everything in nature goes through constant change, the thoughts and actions of human beings change to reflect the constantly changing world and how human beings interact with that reality.

That interaction, the manipulation of nature for subsistence, is how the society is organized. Karl Marx wrote, "By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life." Not every society developed at the same pace nor went through exactly the same stages in the same way, but how the needs of the society are met and the relation of the producers of the needs to the things produced is indeed what society is organized around. And, it is from production that human nature is derived, so it too is not a static thing.

When Marx said capital came into the world "dripping from head to toe from every pore with blood and dirt," bringing with it private property and the subjugation of women, children, gender expression and sexual identity necessary for the patriarchal system to perpetuate the bequeathing of capital, he was speaking of the necessity of the capitalist class to exploit the masses for profit.

The capitalist mode of production brings with it a culture, rooted in the objective demands of a system based on deriving profit.

Under bourgeois capitalist society pop culture is a manufactured thing, a commodity meant to pander to the mores and ideals of the capitalist ruling class, all while making a profit. As Marx said, "The prevailing ideas of every society are the ideas of the ruling class." So, whenever someone lodges a complaint against backwardness that

may appear in a form of artistic expression, then the complaint is against the culture that is part of the capitalist mode of production.

Pop or mass culture, the artistic expression of it, can be a gauge of the willingness of the masses to struggle, expressions of the conditions the masses are faced with, or both at the same time. The same goes for the culture of the oppressed—those workers who face added discrimination, repression and hardship because of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, so-called legal status and/or disability.

However, the culture of the oppressed not only faces infiltration from the ideals of the ruling class, but also from the dominant layer of society. In the U.S. that layer is white. Though there exists the oppression of white women and of white lesbian, gay, bi and trans people, because of the history of genocide, land theft and slavery—part of "the primitive accumulation of capital" denoted by Marx—race is always a factor. The historical development of the U.S. and the world has deemed that the lens of race is always firmly fitted.

So, in the climate that has risen since the firing of Don Imus over his racist, sexist remarks regarding a women's basketball team where most of the players were Black, it is important to defend the musical form that is being criticized.

Racism, sexism, homophobia and all oppressions will begin to disappear with the destruction of capitalist society. These things are ultimately weapons to keep workers apart and fighting against one another. They are always present under capitalism; the intensity of the usage of them comes and goes with crisis and struggle.

The attack on hip-hop culture is a racist attack on a powerful form of expression born from struggle and co-opted for profit and in an attempt to dull its message. It is important that the root cause be identified and workers not get caught up in the attacks.

Don Imus is not a victim of hip-hop, nor was he imitating it. He is a racist and sexist taking the line of the capitalist ruling class. ■

