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Burge trial exposes police torture

By John Bachtell

While the circus trial of disgraced former Governor Rod Blagojevich has garnered the headlines, another more important trial is underway.

Former Chicago Police Lieutenant Jon Burge, who directed the torture of over 100 African American men in police custody over a two-decade period, is on trial for perjury and obstruction of justice.

Burge, who was arrested in 2008, is accused of lying to special prosecutors from the office of District Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald during an investigation in 2006. The statute of limitations on the torture had run out.

Early testimony by witnesses has confirmed Burge's presence during the torture and his bragging about it. If convicted, Burge faces 45 years in prison.

Burge and other police officers have been accused of torturing at least 110 African Americans into forced confessions in the Area 2 police district from 1972-1991. Police violence and racism is deeply embedded in the police department to this day.

Many of the torture victims spent decades in prison and 10 were even sentenced to death. At least one, Andrew Wilson, died in prison in 2007.



It took years of persistent complaints, lawsuits and lobbying before authorities acted, and by that time the statute of limitations on the torture had passed. The City of Chicago spent tens of millions of dollars stubbornly defending Burge and compensating victims of police abuse over the years.

The torture consisted of brutal beatings, kicking, ruptured testicles, near suffocation with plastic bags and the use of electric shock to the

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genitals.

One of the victims was Melvin Jones. He told the Chicago Daily Defender he was tortured over a four-day period in 1982, "I was arrested at my home and taken to Area 2. Lt. Burge was there at the time," said Jones. "I was asked about homi-

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cides I knew nothing about. When I told them I didn't know what they were talking about, Lt. Burge hit me with a gun. About five or six hours later, Burge came back into the room with a little cigar-type box. It was a homemade electric device."

Jones was convicted of a homicide he never confessed to and spent seven years in prison before being retried and found not guilty. Released in 1989, Jones is currently homeless.

Mark Clements spent 28 years in prison after he was tortured into confessing he set a fire that killed four people. Clements was repeatedly beaten and struck in the genitals. It wasn't until the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression and the Innocence Project took up his case that he was finally exonerated. Today, he is executive director of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty.

Another witness, Diane Panos, testified she got into a heated argument with Burge after he stated the defendants "had no rights," and two of the suspects got what they deserved.

The newly formed Illinois Coalition Against Torture, community leaders and elected officials including Alderman Ed Smith have called for re-opening the cases of the 23 men who are still in prison who claimed their confessions were forced from the torture.

The coalition delivered a letter to Mayor Richard M. Daley asking that he direct the Cook County state's attorney to open hearings on the cases. Daley was states attorney during the time much of the torture took place. By all accounts he was aware of it and by his inaction actually aided in covering it up. In fact, Daley prosecuted 85% of the cases where confessions were gotten from torture.

"We need a cross section of the city to speak out. If only the Black community does, then it makes it seem like it's just a Black problem," said torture victim Darrel Cannon. "It goes beyond a Black problem. This problem is injustice period. Injustice has no color."



John Bachtell writes for the People's World.

Employ our youth: Clean up the Gulf

By PW Editorial Board

Chris Matthews was right in calling for the creation of a Civilian Conservation Corp to put thousands of young people to work cleaning up one of our nation's most beautiful and economically viable areas. Even if it's plugged tomorrow, which seems unlikely, millions of barrels of life killing crude oil has to be cleaned up. Experts are saying that the job will take us well into next year. In three seasons the ecological balance can be restored along with the sea life on which many families depend to make a livelihood.

British Petroleum should pay a dear price for the mess they have made. The oil catastrophe in the Gulf demands more fundamental solutions to their reckless business practices. BP should be nationalized and put under people's democratic control. Let the people who care about the environment have the final say on regulation enforcement and penalties: the men and women who fish for a living, the tourist industries, unions and civic groups.

Why? Because this and other incidents show

that the first priority of the big oil companies is to stuff their pockets with billions of dollars in profits. Worker safety and the protection of the environment are secondary.. What is happening in the Gulf is the worst we've seen but if these profits hungry pirates are allowed to violate regulations and disregard human life and nature what is happening today will happen again and again. And what is happening now must not happen again.

In the meantime the national unemployment is still over 10% and may go higher. This problem is especially acute when it comes to African American and Latino youth.

An immediate measure that will help ease this problem would be to train and send thousands of unemployed youth to the Gulf Coast to do a historic public service and gain some skills. These young people should be paid decent wages and have the right to unionize and have affirmative action and full OSHA protection.

Who's going to foot the bill? Frankly we say let BP pay until the job is done.

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Activists hear Christian leader

By Jim Lane

Wanda Banks gets really excited when she talks about how well her daughter is doing in her Cuban medical school. By the time she finishes, everybody is convinced that Darnna Banks really is super!

Sister Banks also has a special place in her heart, she explains, for Reverend Lucius Walker. It was Walker, on an earlier visit, who first told Darnna that she could get her medical degree on full scholarship in Havana. Reverend Walker visited old friends like Wanda Banks and others at St Luke's United Methodist Community Center on June 9. He was touring Dallas to tell more people about the struggles for peace, civil rights, justice, and international solidarity.

In his role as head of Pastors for Peace since 1967, Reverend Walker has made friends throughout the movement as he shepherded caravans through the states and southward to deliver equipment and supplies to our neighbors in Mexico, Central America, and, most often, Cuba. Reverend Charles Stovall, host of the event, talked about the courage of the "caravanistas" as they travel to faraway places and incur the displeasure of America's wealthy rulers. Reverend Walker was even shot, once, in the jungle of Nicaragua, probably by President Reagan's "contra" mercenaries!

The Reverend Walker is a model of humility. People leaned forward as he spoke, softly, about his commitment to his Christian faith, even when



it leads him far away from safety and public approval. He said that everyone should live out their commitment to the Gospel and live out their commitment to justice." Pressed for more explanation of his theology, the modest minister replied, "I'm not a great theologian. I just take what Jesus said seriously."

"Jesus and his disciples were the first communists," he told the group quietly, "Not Communists with a capital 'C' because that didn't come along until later.... But Jesus made it very clear that our job description as Christian disciples is to ... love one another, serve one another, and work in the interests of those who are the least by the world's standards."

If there was any hardness in Reverend Walker's comments, they came when he talked about the embargo against Cuba. He quoted the Pope as saying that the embargo is "monstrously immoral." He compared it to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, and laid the blame for both squarely on imperialism. "To be silent in the face of all this," he said, "is a total violation of what Jesus told us to do!"

**Jesus and his disciples were the first communists.
- Lucius Walker**

Hyatt workers protest in San Francisco

By Marilyn Bechtel

Some 400 workers at the Hyatt Regency hotel here held a three-day strike June 8-10, to protest the hotel chain's efforts to press them even harder despite a significantly improving financial picture for the hospitality industry generally and the Hyatt chain in particular.

The strikers are among 9,000 San Francisco hotel workers who have been without a contract since last August. The strike also overlapped with the June 9 action in Chicago, in which workers and their supporters forced suspension of the Hyatt corporation's annual shareholders' meeting.

The union representing the workers, Unite Here! Local 2, points out that in San Francisco, hotel industry revenue is projected to grow by 4 percent in the rest of 2010, 12 percent in 2011 and 14 percent in 2012.

Unite Here! also says that since Hyatt made its initial public offering last November, its share have risen by 50 percent, and as recently as March, Hyatt had \$1.3 billion cash on hand.

Topping the list of issues in the San Francisco negotiations are workload protections, keeping affordable health care benefits, securing retirement, and protecting the right of non-union workers to freely choose whether to form a union.

All three Hyatts in this city - the Grand Hyatt and Hyatt Fisherman's Wharf as well as the Hyatt Regency - are now under worker-initiated boycotts.

'Gooooool!' Abre Copa Mundial

Por Pepe Lozano

Entre un mar de camisetas verdes, cientos de aficionados gritaban a favor de México aquí este viernes en la mañana del 11 de junio en un gimnasio de fútbol mientras el equipo azteca jugaba contra Sudáfrica en el muy esperado juego inicial de la Copa Mundial 2010.

En la primera mitad, parecía que México tuvo la ventaja, controlando la pelota durante la mayoría del tiempo aunque no lograron marcar ningún gol luego de varios tiros.

A la mitad, los organizadores de la fiesta de aficionados tuvieron una competencia entre los presentes para ver quién podía gritar "GOL" con más fuerza y creatividad. Recibieron los ganadores camisetas del equipo mexicano encuadradas autografiadas por los jugadores del equipo. Estaban llenas las salas con gente, en su mayoría aficionados mexicanos y mexicanas, jóvenes y viejos. Había mucho ánimo, ruido y diversión. Pero cuando Sudáfrica marcó su gol, hubo silencio.

Finalizaron el primer juego de la Copa con un empate, 1 a 1.

"De niño, el fútbol siempre fue parte de mi cultura mexicana", dijo Marco Hernández, 35. "Es la pasión que compartimos".

Comentaban muchos que es maravilloso que se está celebrando por primera vez la Copa Mundial en suelo africano. Es un plus tremendo para el deporte a escala mundial y en especial para las naciones africanas

participantes, dijeron.

Dijeron otros que el fútbol es mucho más que un deporte que nos encanta: vivimos por el fútbol.

Un aspecto especial del evento fue la presencia de Pavel Pardo, jugador legendario de México, que había ayudado a su equipo calificar para la Copa Mundial de este año. Jugaba Pardo en los juegos de 2006 y es un jugador activo con Club América en la ciudad de México.

"La Copa Mundial es importante para el mundo entero, pero tiene una importancia especial para el pueblo africano porque está en Sudáfrica, dijo Pardo.

"El fútbol y la Copa Mundial reúnen a la gente y reúnen a las naciones", dijo él. Es un momento para la solidaridad internacional, el antirracismo y el empoderamiento comunitario, dijo.

Dicen aficionados que los equipos que mirar son Argentina, España y Brasil.

"Solo 32 equipos son dignos de jugar en la Copa Mundial, y llegará a uno que tendrá los galardones para los próximos cuatro años", dijo Patricia Arreola, de 27 años, que trabaja con la Universidad Estatal de Illinois. A Arreola siempre le ha encantado el fútbol, aun antes de jugar como portera para su equipo de preparatoria.

"Además, el fútbol suele tener a bastantes muchachos guapos con piernas bonitas", dijo con una risa.