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Labor launches Week of Action for jobs

By John Wojcik

The nation's labor movement will hold picket lines and rallies in front of banks and financial institutions in 200 cities across America the week of March 15-20, the AFL-CIO announced at its executive council meeting March 3 in Orlando, Fla.

Union leaders said the demonstrations, under the banner "Good Jobs Now, Make Wall Street Pay," will be the first of many mass mobilizations that will bring labor and its allies into the streets throughout the year.

The institutions to be targeted starting March 15 include Bank of America, Citibank, JP Morgan, Wells Fargo, Morgan Stanley, AIG and Goldman Sachs.

Leaders of more than 50 major unions met to finalize plans to mobilize local unions, labor councils and community allies to descend on the big banks.

"We've already got the plans in place for 90 of those demonstrations and the response is pouring in from local unions and from local labor councils, including ones we have hardly ever heard from," said AFL-CIO Communications Director Denise Mitchell.

"The big financial institutions created this crisis, so they should pay to restore the 8.4 million



jobs lost as a result of it," said Richard Trumka, the federation's president, as he emerged from the meeting. "In fact, it's 11 million jobs that we need, the 8.4 that they destroyed plus the 2.6 needed to make up for population growth."

Mitchell said the demands on the banks will come down to three things: "Stop refusing to pay your fair share, stop fighting financial reform and start lending to ordinary folks again so they can do

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business and create jobs."

Explaining why the March protests will focus on banks Damon Silver, the AFL-CIO's policy director, said banks not only created the crisis but "they are the ones who can and should pay for the solution."

Although the AFL-CIO backs Obama's de-

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mand that banks repay money they got under the Troubled Assets Relief Program, Silver said stronger additional measures are needed to raise the kind of money needed for a massive federal jobs program.

The president's proposal would generate \$70 billion at most, Silver said, "but a tiny financial transactions tax would raise \$400 billion, enough to create many jobs."

"And they can't use the excuse that this would drive business out of the American markets and into the overseas ones," Trumka said, "because there is strong support for this type of tax in the United Kingdom, in all the European Union countries and elsewhere."

"This type of tax wouldn't hurt serious investors," Silver said, "but would discourage reckless speculators and gamblers who buy and sell at astronomically high frequency rates to make money and run."

Asked by reporters whether labor leaders had talked to the Obama administration about such a tax and whether the administration would support it, Trumka said he had raised the issue and

that "it depends upon who you talk to in the administration - some support it and others are not so sure."

Trumka and Silver both also called for higher taxes on CEO pay, establishment of a strong consumer protection agency, regulations on the "shadow" markets, including hedge funds, and what has been called the "Volcker proposal" - re-instituting laws that separate the functions of regular and commercial banks.

The GOP-run Congress, back in 1999, passed a bill that tore down the wall between regular and commercial banking, the trading of stocks, bonds and other pieces of paper. Democratic President Bill Clinton signed it into law.

The barrier had been erected by Congress and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt after finance industry excesses plunged the nation into the Great Depression.

Read more coverage from AFL-CIO's Orlando, Fla., meeting at www.peoplesworld.org.



John Wojcik writes for the People's World.

Wrong path for education

By PW Editorial Board

While campaigning for the presidency, Barack Obama made it clear to the nation that education would be among his top three priorities if elected. He is making good on that promise.

Unfortunately, it's starting off on the wrong path.

Announcing his revamping of the No Child Left Behind law, the president unveiled a policy that emphasizes mass firings of teachers, school closings and replacing public schools with privately run, and many times for-profit, charter schools.

The president made these announcements while giving his full support to the Rhode Island superintendent and school board that fired en masse 90-plus high school teachers. In choosing to taking this public stance, the White House is sending a signal to all school districts: punish the teachers for low-performing schools, rip up collective bargaining contracts; don't worry, the federal government agrees.

Some see this ominous sign as a political move to appeal to conservatives and anti-union

independents. But such a move will have grave consequences for unity and progress down the road.

Plus, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, formerly Chicago Public Schools superintendent, practiced this "turnaround" model. The Commercial Club of Chicago, a supporter of Duncan, issued a report last summer saying city schools have made little progress since 2003, when Duncan took over, and they are "abysmal."

Teachers, parents, administrators all agree with the president: public education **MUST** improve. But the key word is "improve," not demolish. Lower class sizes could make a huge difference in educating children. Public education is suffering death by 1,000 cuts. Teacher mentoring, support and evaluation - a management responsibility - is perfunctory at best. Most teachers report that "professional development" provided by school higher-ups (via high-cost consultants) is useless.

That's the reality of public schools today, and scapegoating teachers won't change that hard reality. It will only make the situation worse.



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Big voter turnout in Iraq, undeterred by violence

By Susan Webb

Iraqi voters turned out heavily in March 7 national elections, despite an upsurge of violence leading up to the balloting. Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission said the turnout reached 62 percent, not including several days of early voting.

The Aswat al-Iraq (Voices of Iraq) news agency reported the elections were the largest ever held in Iraq, with 19 million eligible voters in all of Iraq's 18 provinces. They were electing 325 members of Parliament who will govern Iraq for the next four years, as the country emerges from U.S. military occupation.

Attacks in Baghdad and elsewhere on the morning of the elections left over 30 people killed and 32 others wounded. Iraqi politicians from left to right had warned that the attacks were aiming to intimidate voters.

Judging by the turnout, however, the majority refused to be intimidated.

The results will be marred by the problematic election law adopted after months of wrangling. The law's provisions favor the currently dominant political groupings. Iraq's Communist Party and other groups had fought for a more even-handed election process, and assailed the law as undemocratic.

Nevertheless, the Communists said building democracy in Iraq would require continuing struggle, and the party waged an active election campaign, leading a left People's Unity slate with several other small parties. A rally by the Communist-led slate at an outdoor stadium in Baghdad drew some 15,000 participants.

A few prominent slates are expected to wind up with the most seats in Parliament. They include:

- Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of



Law slate, which includes his Shiite Islamic Dawa party;

- the Shiite Islamic Iraqi National Alliance, which includes the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, Moqtada al-Sadr's group;
- the Iraqi National Movement/Iraqiya slate headed by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, which includes a number of Sunni groups;
- the Kurdish Alliance, which includes the two long-standing ruling Kurdish parties.

Some combination of these will determine who the next prime minister will be.

Every one of them has presented itself as a national, rather than a religious or sectarian-based, coalition, reflecting Iraqi public's rejection of religious candidates and sectarian-based politics.

Before the election, hints were floated that the United States might delay its phased troop withdrawal. After the elections, Foreign Policy magazine analyst Marc Lych suggested that the withdrawal would proceed as scheduled. "The election produced nothing to change the U.S. drawdown schedule, and offered little sign that Iraqis are eager to revise the SOFA or ask the U.S. to keep troops longer. Iraq is in Iraqi hands."

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Activist upbeat about California single-payer

By Gail Ryall

Iwould be surprised if we don't have single-payer by the time I'm 80," said 75-year old Carolyn Negrete of Health Care for All Sacramento Valley. "It will be a matter of getting people in every district and getting the word out. There hasn't been enough work done to get common demand for it yet."

The single-payer bill, SB 810, authored by state Senator Mark Leno, is basically the same as previous bills introduced by former state Senator Sheila Kuehl, which passed the state legislature twice, but was vetoed both times by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

So far, it has been passed by the State Senate, and passage is expected in the Assembly, where the Democrats have a strong majority.

The bill would establish an appointed premium health commission with a timetable of one year to bring specialists together to plan a state single-payer scheme, and another year to implement it, Negrete said. State funding would be at the same level, minus profit and overhead paid now to insurance giants, she said.

A payroll tax would apply to all incomes from \$7,000 to \$150,000 yearly. Tax would not be paid on more than \$150,000, but those who earn \$1 million or more would pay 1% of income over \$250,000.

Afro Norteamericano y los derechos de los inmigrantes: Unidos venceremos

Por Jarvis Tyner

Todos los trabajadores tenemos mucho invertido en la lucha por los derechos de los inmigrantes, y debemos rechazar a aquellas personas que pretenden utilizar la cuestión de inmigración para dividir al pueblo afronorteamericano, latino y anglo.

Somos una nación de inmigrantes. En los Estados Unidos tenemos una clase trabajadora más multirracial y multinacional de todo el mundo.

Los afronorteamericanos también tenemos nuestro pasado inmigrante. Pues nosotros éramos "inmigrantes ilegales" por 300 años luego de ser arastrados de nuestros hogares.

Muchos esclavos africanos escaparon y se unieron con las tribus indígenas. Cuando México abolió la esclavitud en 1829 muchos esclavos norteamericanos cruzaron la frontera rumbo al sur para ganar su libertad. Estos son algunos de los lazos históricos que mostraban solidaridad entre personas afronorteamericanas, blancas, latinas e indígenas en la lucha contra el horror que era la esclavitud norteamericana.

Actualmente esa misma clase de racismo que se ha dirigido en contra del pueblo afro americano se está lanzando en contra de los inmigrantes. Hace falta la unidad para resistir.

Un trato justo y humano a los inmigrantes excluye deportaciones masivas y la criminalización, e incluiría la amnistía. Estas son demandas que

deben contar con el apoyo de toda la gente decente dondequiera que esté.

Los que pretenden difundir los conceptos antiinmigrantes en nuestra comunidad afronorteamericana no están haciendo otra cosa más que promover el racismo y la violencia, y los debemos rechazar de plano.

La mera verdad es que nuestras leyes migratorias son opresivas e injustas. Se aplican selectivamente dependiendo de la nacionalidad, raza y clase social del trabajador inmigrante.

La clave para cualquier resolución humana al problema es alguna clase de amnistía que una a las familias, ponga fin a la criminalización de millones de trabajadores y que les proporcione a los indocumentados un camino hacia la ciudadanía y el empleo legal.

Necesitamos urgentemente una revolución verde que pueda crear millones de trabajos bien pagados. Se tiene que aprobar un proyecto de ley de empleos a nivel nacional, utilizando dinero federal para crear millones de puestos de trabajo de alta calidad.

El momento de sacar a nuestras tropas de Irak y Afganistán y a utilizar estos miles de millones de dólares que se derrochan en las guerras a la tarea de reconstruir nuestra economía.

La economía norteamericana sacará mucho mas provecho de un aumento en el poder adquisitivo de la clase trabajadora, efectuada por una creación masiva de trabajos subvencionado con impuestos a los ricos.

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