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75 years later, WPA is sorely needed again

By Rick Nagin

April 8 marked the 75th anniversary of the Works Progress Administration, the largest federal jobs program in U.S. history and the most famous program of the New Deal of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

During its existence from 1935 to 1943, the WPA employed over 8.5 million victims of the Great Depression in public works projects, large and small, in every corner of the country.

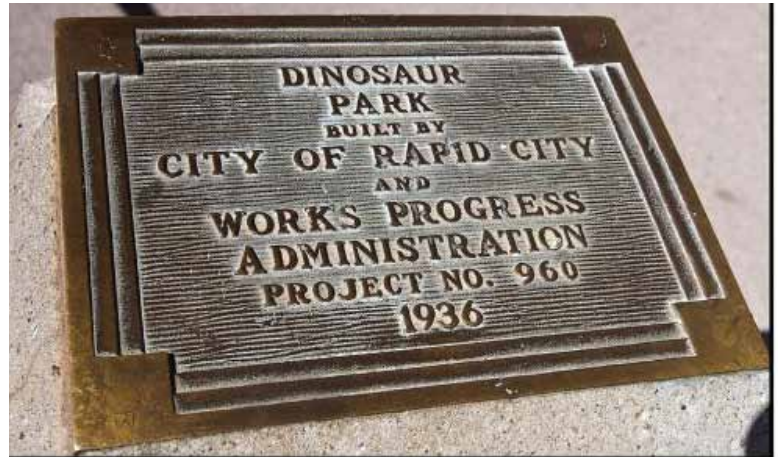
The struggle to create the program had an eerie similarity to the recent fight for health care reform.

The bill establishing the WPA easily passed the House of Representatives, but faced fierce opposition from Senate Republicans howling “socialism” and Southern Dixiecrats opposed to any program helping African Americans, who suffered unemployment at nearly twice the rate of whites.

The right wing also fought the WPA because they saw it as consolidating Roosevelt’s voter base.

The WPA became the largest employer in the country and workers received prevailing wages and benefits. Many were organized in the newly legalized labor movement.

While opponents screamed that WPA projects were “make-work” and “boondoggles,” the achievements of the WPA are legendary and remain treasures of our democratic heritage.



They also created a huge demand for steel, fuel, construction materials and consumer goods and got the Depression-wracked private economy moving again.

Under the WPA, construction of the 469-mile Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia began.

The 69-mile Merritt Parkway in Connecticut and the 127-mile Key West Overseas Highway were built.

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In New York City the WPA built the Triborough Bridge, Lincoln Tunnel, Central Park Zoo and LaGuardia Airport.

The WPA built numerous sports facilities including the Orange Bowl in Miami, and many public buildings including the Oregon State Capitol, the Tennessee Supreme Court building, the Kan-

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sas City City Hall and the Oklahoma City municipal auditorium.

All told, WPA workers produced 650,000 miles of roads, and built or improved 124,000 bridges, 800 airports and 125,000 public buildings. The WPA Federal Artists Project employed thousands of artists, writers and musicians, who produced over 10,000 arts projects. Many of these projects were murals.

“Government has a final responsibility for the welfare of its citizens,” President Roosevelt told Congress in his annual message in 1938. “If private cooperative effort fails to provide work for willing hands and relief for the unfortunate, those suffering hardship through no fault of their own have a right to call upon the government for aid. And a government worthy of the name must make a fitting response.”

In today’s crisis there are 20 million Americans desperately in need of full-time work. Just as during the Great Depression, the private sector will not and cannot produce the jobs needed to rebuild our nation’s crumbling infrastructure,

launch the needed new green energy projects and breathe new life into our nation’s economy. There is simply no market. Working people have been impoverished and cannot buy the goods and services to revitalize the nation. Further, there are not sufficient profit margins to motivate the private sector to shift and take up these badly needed projects.

Marking the 75th anniversary of the WPA, Jobs for America Now, the 60-member coalition launched by the AFL-CIO, called for all-out support of HR 4812, the \$100 billion Jobs for Main Street bill to assist local government and school districts. The bill, written by California Congressman George Miller, has just over 100 co-sponsors and aims to create or save 1 million jobs. While it is the most ambitious jobs bill so far, it only begins to address the unemployment problem. Ultimately the only solution is massive, direct employment by the federal government - a new WPA.



Rick Nagin writes for the People’s World.

For true nuclear security, disarmament is essential

By PW Editorial Board

As a presidential candidate, Barack Obama vowed to pursue “a world in which there are no nuclear weapons.” He also pledged that during his first year in office he would “lead a global effort to secure all loose nuclear materials.”

This spring his administration is building on those promises with its Nuclear Posture Review, the New START treaty to cut U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons, and now this week’s nuclear security summit. The process will continue next month at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

As it advocates smaller weapons stockpiles and narrows the criteria for U.S. use of nuclear weapons, the Nuclear Posture Review also highlights the need to secure vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide.

Addressing the summit, President Obama highlighted “a cruel irony of history - the risk of a nuclear confrontation between nations has gone down, but the risk of nuclear attack has gone up” and now “is one of the greatest threats to global security.”

In its final statement, the summit called on

nations to cooperate for nuclear security, including keeping “non-state actors” from being able to use nuclear materials “for malicious purposes,” and barring illicit nuclear trafficking.

International cooperation in “nuclear detection, forensics, law enforcement and the development of new technologies,” strengthening “physical protection” and “material accountancy” - all are indeed vital in today’s world.

But no matter how successful such cooperation becomes, true nuclear security also depends on fulfilling the president’s other objectives.

Much rests on what is sure to be a centerpiece of next month’s review of progress under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty - the obligation of all signers under its Article VI “to pursue negotiations in good faith” to achieve complete nuclear disarmament and to conclude a treaty for general and complete disarmament.

Only when this great goal is won will it be possible to truly end the threat of catastrophe from the “malicious” use of nuclear materials, whether by nations, by “non-state actors” or by accident.



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Demand to curb Wall Street has GOP in a bind

By John Wojcik

Reflecting the mass anger at Wall Street, President Obama has told congressional leaders that he will not accept a weak finance reform bill simply in the name of “bipartisan accomplishment,” according to White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.

Republicans such as Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, after having spent months working on crafting a bill as a member of the Senate’s banking committee, may break ranks with their party if it tries to filibuster reform.

The national outcry for steps to curb Wall Street has so emboldened Democrats that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., is prepared to bring the banking committee bill to the floor with no concessions to Republicans and essentially dare them to vote against the measure, according to numerous sources on Capitol Hill.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., banking committee chair, took to the floor of the Senate and blasted Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and other right-wing Republicans for “falsely claiming that the bill would create more bailouts.”

Dodd told the Senate that the GOP, out of desperation, had “turned to Frank Luntz, their political strategist and here is what Mr. Luntz came up with, and I quote: ‘The single best way to kill any legislation is to link it to the Big Bank Bailout.’”

“It’s a naked political strategy,” Dodd declared, warning, “And if it succeeds and another crisis sinks the American economy, then the next recession and all of the damage it will bring to



middle class families will have happened for the sake of a talking point.”

A review of government records on campaign contributions shows that McConnell takes more money from Wall Street than any other sector.

Labor and its allies, meanwhile, continue to turn up the heat on Congress.

The AFL-CIO has announced that unions will take the battle directly to Wall Street April 29 with a mass march and rally for finance reform. The unions intend too make the point that the big banks were responsible for the loss of 11 million jobs in America and they should be made to pay to help create the new jobs needed.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said that, in addition to the reform measures emerging from Congress, there should be a financial transactions tax to raise money for massive federally funded jobs programs.

“Working people are going to tell the banks on the 29th that we are not their ATMs,” Trumka said.

A review of government records on campaign contributions shows that McConnell takes more money from Wall Street than any other sector.

Fund kids, not bombs

By Matthew Weinstein

Community residents filled the library at Brooklyn Tech High School, April 13, to hear Jo Comerford, executive director of the National Priorities Project, speak on budget cuts, the federal budget and war spending.

Comerford, a nationally-known expert on budget matters and our country's tragically misdirected national priorities, helped clarify the complicated subject of federal spending so that people could see where and how their tax dollars are being used (or misused).

People were able to see clearly that the oversized Pentagon budget (\$737 billion next year!) and the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (\$1 trillion since 2001!) were draining resources so that solutions to urgent domestic problems are becoming difficult, if not impossible, to solve.

Comerford also visited students at two high schools in the hours before the evening event. At Carroll Gardens' Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies and later at Brooklyn Tech High School, she addressed students who were asking why free transit MetroCards are being threatened by the MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) and the city - who both are pleading poverty.

She pointed out that just in Brooklyn alone, taxpayers have doled out \$9 billion on the two wars - money which could solve the mass transit shortfall many times over.

The events were sponsored by Brooklyn For Peace. The Brooklyn Tech events were also sponsored by Progressive Student Awareness, a student club at that school.

Veteranos de guerra inmigrantes se enfrentan a la deportación

Por Joe Sims

En 350 centros de detención a través del país, hasta 1.000 veteranos de guerra nacidos en el extranjero, residentes permanentes pero todavía no ciudadanos, esperan la deportación.

Los veteranos militares, muchos de ellos víctimas del desorden de estrés postraumático luego de haber servido en Vietnam, Irak y Afganistán, cometieron crímenes graves después de recibir su separación honorable (franca libertad). Bajo la ley existente exigen estas condenas una deportación automática. Un alto porcentaje de las condenas están relacionadas con las drogas.

Algunos 32.000 inmigrantes ya guardan prisión por varias ofensas esperando ser deportados a sus países de origen.

Uno de estos detenidos es Rohan Coombs, ex Marine nacido en Jamaica que peleó en el Operativo "Tormenta de desierto" [la primera guerra del Golfo]. Coombs, que sufre de estrés postraumático, fue condenado por posesión de marihuana. Luego de servir su condena en la prisión, fue entregado a las autoridades migratorias, informa Democracy Now.

Coombs, quien se alistó en los Marines en 1988, fue informado por sus oficiales comandantes que "era ciudadano por haber prestado juramento de soldado y por haber sido informado

que era propiedad de EEUU y que eso lo hizo ciudadano. Ahora el juez en su caso lo dice que el no es ciudadano y que debe ser deportado a un país que ni ha visitado por más de 30 años.

El veterano de guerra se encuentra en este momento detenido en una facilidad de El Centro, California.

Su caso y los de otros están siendo peleados por el National Lawyers Guild (Gremio Nacional de Abogados) con el apoyo de otros grupos de apoyo a veteranos militares. Alega el National Lawyers Guild "que los veteranos militares deben ser considerados como 'connacionales' norteamericanos porque en el momento de alistarse en las fuerzas armadas norteamericanos, tuvieron que prestar un juramento de lealtad muy similar al juramento de ciudadanía.

La ley de inmigración enmendada de 1996 amplió la definición de "crímenes serios" por los cuales una persona puede ser deportada.

La propuesta de ley HR 2988 ha sido introducida en el Congreso para dirigirse al problema. Enmendaría esta propuesta "el Código judicial de Estados Unidos para declarar claramente que lactivos de las fuerzas armadas de EEUU son connacionales no ciudadanos, y para pedir al Departamento de Seguridad Patria una suspensión de sus expulsiones de los Estados Unidos de América".

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523
Email: contact@peoplesworld.org