

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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August 13, 2010

Obama asks labor to help prevent GOP takeover

By John Wojcik



President Obama spent the morning of his birthday, Aug. 4, asking leaders of the labor movement to do everything they can to prevent a Republican takeover of Congress this November.

His speech to the AFL-CIO's executive council here underlined what both Obama and the labor movement believe is at stake in the 2010 elections.

Talking about Republicans, the president declared: "They want to go backward; we want to move America forward. That's the choice in this upcoming election. All your members need to understand that choice."

Obama said mass unemployment in America is unacceptable and the pain it causes "goes beyond just the financial pain. It goes to who you are as a person."

"It hits right in the gut," the president said. "Having a conversation with your spouse, and saying, you know, 'maybe we can't afford this house anymore, maybe we're going to have to give up on being able to save for our kid's college education.' That goes directly to people's identities, to their cores."

Frustration and anger have surfaced all over America as the result of a long, deep recession that has left at least 16 million unemployed. Republicans are trying to ride that anger and frustra-

tion into control of one or both houses of Congress in November.

Obama told the labor leaders that a return to Republican control would be a return to policies that created the economic disaster in the first place.

He described the GOP as "a driver that drove the car into the ditch and stood there for a year and a half, while we put on boots, got down into the mud, and heaved and hoed and pulled to get

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that car out. Just as we get it to the ledge, they come along and say, 'We want the keys back.' Uh uh, you can't have the keys back. We will not give them back!" Obama's story was cut off, first by laughter, then by prolonged applause.

Obama said, "With the help of workers and

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unions we are going to rebuild our country stronger than ever, and at the heart of it will be three simple words: made in America.”

Part of the choice in the November elections, he said, is a choice between job creation in America or jobs going elsewhere. “Instead of giving tax breaks to corporations that want to ship our jobs overseas, we want to give tax breaks to companies that are investing right here in the U.S.A.”

The president acknowledged that “we are a long way from solving all our problems” but insisted that “we are on the right track.”

“Instead of losing millions of jobs,” he said, “we have created jobs for six straight months in the private sector. Instead of an economy that is contracting, we’ve got an economy that is expanding. So the last thing we would want to do is go back to what we were doing before.”

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka asked Obama what he had to say regarding the plight of millions who do have jobs but jobs that pay poverty wages and afford workers no voice at the

workplace.

“Look, it’s going to be tough with the Senate we have,” Obama responded, “but we are going to keep fighting for the Employee Free Choice Act.” The president noted that he had worked to create conditions in the Labor Department and on the National Labor Relations Board that would, “at least make it more likely that workers can get fast fair elections when they want a union.”

Obama recalled President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s comment that if he were a factory worker, he’d join a union.

Obama said: “I think that’s true for workers generally. If I were a miner, I’d want a union representing me to make sure that I was safe and that we wouldn’t have some of the tragedies that we’ve been seeing in the coal industry. If I was a teacher, I’d want a union to make sure the teachers’ perspective was expressed.”



John Wojcik writes for the People’s World.

Labor pushes for the swing vote

By PW Editorial Board

When millions of independents went out to vote for President Obama and the Democrats in 2008, eight years of Republican rule came to an end.

According to numerous polls, widespread anger about the economy has put a serious dent in this support with pollsters reporting that the “swing voters,” most of them working-class moderates and even some conservatives, are now ready to vote against all incumbents, even if it means putting the GOP back in power.

The labor movement made it clear at its Battleground States Conference last week that it is not giving up on the “swing voters,” and it has a not-so-secret weapon with which it is trying and to win them over. That weapon is Working America, a labor organization formed by the AFL-CIO that is signing up non-union members in droves. The group is knocking on doors and talking to tens of thousands of these swing voters every month and, in a report from the field, told labor leaders here

that two out of three people it engages at their doors are joining up.

The biggest problems flow from the uncertainty, anger and confusion over what should be done about jobs and the economy. 21 percent of phone respondents and 30 percent at the door simply don’t know what to do. On top of this, the surveyors said, unemployment and the fear of unemployment are devastating people in the swing voter group. 500,000 of Working America’s 3 million members, for example, are jobless. The interviews conducted by Working America are filled with fear about feeding families and heavy with the loss of both income and self-esteem

Union leaders are not discouraged. Swing voters are eager to engage in dialogue, and receptive to the message of good jobs, investment in communities and fair taxes. The challenge, they say, is how to make this connection big enough and strong enough to impact the 2010 elections. It’s a challenge, they agree, that must eventually be met.

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Civil liberties groups sue Treasury Dept.

By Joe Sims

The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control today granted the American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Constitutional Rights a license to represent accused terrorist Anwar Al-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen living in Yemen. According to news reports, Anwar Al-Awlaki has been placed on a CIA hit list for targeted assassination.

The civil liberties groups had earlier in the week sued the Treasury Department for making it illegal to provide free representation without a specific license.

The U.S. government has placed Al-Awlaki in the category of "specially designated global terrorist," due to his links to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. That category is a legal cover for selective killings by U.S. Special Forces and also forbids any links to the individual, including legal counsel. The penalty for failure to abide by the restrictions is 20 years imprisonment and up to \$1 million in fines.

At issue is both the constitutionality of the need for a license to represent U.S. citizens in such cases and the right of the government to target citizens for death without due process. CNN reports that "the ACLU and CCR issued a joint statement saying they "appreciate" the license, but "continue to believe (the Office of Foreign Assets Control) regulations are unconstitutional because they require lawyers who are providing uncompensated legal representation to seek the government's permission before challenging the constitutionality of the government's conduct."

The ACLU and CCR were retained by Anwar Al-Awlaki's father. The U.S.-born cleric is accused of involvement in both the failed Christmas plane bombing over Detroit and the spring killings at Fort Hood.

The license had been applied for on July 23. The suit was filed on Wednesday. Their legal brief says in part: "The notion that the govern-



ment can compel a citizen to seek its permission before challenging the constitutionality of its actions in court is wholly foreign to our constitutional system, (and as) non-profit organizations dedicated to protecting civil liberties and human rights, Plaintiffs have a First Amendment (Fifth Amendment, and Separation of Powers) right to represent clients in litigation consistent with their organizational missions."

Al Jazeera reports that the White House denies civil liberties is at issue: Awlaki "is someone who has sworn allegiance to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, is a regional commander for that group in Yemen, has and continues to direct attacks there and, as we know, against innocent men, women and children in this country," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs told reporters.

At the heart of the debate is whether President Obama or any president has the right to act as judge, jury and executioner, away from a battle zone.

Many times over the last years, persons suspected of terrorist activities have been later found out to be not guilty.

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Locked-out Honeywell workers fight back

By Scott Marshall

Over 2500 steelworkers and supporters converged on Metropolis Illinois for a mass rally and march against Honeywell this past Saturday. (video below) Metropolis calls itself the home of Superman.

The Metropolis Honeywell nuclear conversion plant starts the process of making nuclear fuel. The plant employs about 220 union workers. Some 42 have died of cancer and another 27 are struggling with the disease. Honeywell wants to cut health care and pensions for these steel workers.

The locked out workers had offered to work without a contract while continuing negotiations. But Honeywell refused. The company locked them out and brought in scabs instead.

The workers enjoy the support of the community in this working-class town of 6500 in southern Illinois. Union members and supporters came on buses from around Illinois and West Virginia to march in solidarity. Contingents included United Steelworkers, United Mineworkers, United Auto workers, International Association of Machinists, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Operating Engineers, Communication Workers of America, and Plumbers and Pipefitters.

Darrell Lillie, the steelworkers local union president, told the cheering crowd, "with your support we will stay out one day longer than Honeywell, until we get justice for our members." Jim Robinson, USW District 7 Director told the rally that Honeywell, like many giant multinational corporations, is trying to use the economic crisis to bust unions.

Se marca aniversario XX de la ley 'Norteamericanos con Discapacidades'

Por Marco Elizondo

La ley "Norteamericanos con Discapacidades" o ADA por sus siglas en inglés, fue implementada el 26 de enero de 1992. La ley consiste de cinco títulos que prohíben la discriminación en contra de personas discapacitadas en EEUU.

Para celebrar debidamente el aniversario XX de esta ley, el presidente Barack Obama firmó una orden ejecutiva nombrando al gobierno federal como "empleador modelo" para personas con discapacidades.

"Vamos a incrementar el reclutamiento, vamos a incrementar el adiestramiento, vamos a incrementar la retención de empleados," dijo Obama desde la Casa Blanca. "Nuestro personal encargado de contratar estará mejor adiestrado. Cada departamento tendrá un oficial responsable de alcanzar las metas que hemos fijado. Y yo voy a esperar reportes regularmente." El departamento de Justicia establecerá dos reglas nuevas en contra de la discriminación por cualquier clase de incapacidad. Este departamento también está tratando de facilitar a los centros de emergencia de llamadas 911 para aceptar mensajes de texto o video por parte de personas incapacitadas. Los cines deberían también ofrecer películas con subtítulos. El uso de equipo de trabajo más accesible y muebles, incluyendo mesas de examinación médica, sillas y básculas además de cajeros automáticos con sistemas de audio también ayudarían".

"Nuestra meta es nivelar el cam-

po en el que juegan las personas con discapacidades para asegurarnos de que todos tengan las mismas oportunidades" dijo Kareem Dale al Washington Post. Dale está ciego.

En 18 meses, por primera vez, lugares recreativos así como parques de diversiones, gimnasios, albercas y estadios deberán ser construidas de acuerdo con los reglamentos del año 2010. Esto también se aplicará a todos los edificios por construir.

"Igualdad de acceso. Igualdad de oportunidad. La libertad de hacer lo que queremos con nuestras vidas. Estos no son principios que pertenecen a algún grupo social o partido político determinado. Son principios comunes. Son principios norteamericanos," dijo Obama.

Mientras la ley ha sido "transformativa" para decenas de millones de personas, todavía falta mucho por hacer.

De acuerdo con un comunicado de prensa de la Fundación Kessler y la Organización Nacional de Discapacidades, muchos norteamericanos con discapacidades "todavía sufren con muchos de las mismas cuestiones de estilos de vida y problemas económicos que se sufrían en la década de los 1990 cuando la ADA se convirtió en ley federal".

Dicen expertos que la discriminación en el lugar de trabajo aún ocurre regularmente y las tasas de desempleo entre personas con discapacidades son mucho mas altas que las de personas sin discapacidades.

NATIONAL CONTACT

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