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Tax battle's teachable moment

By Sam Webb



The battle over taxes was a teachable moment. But left and progressive people missed the boat. An opportunity to teach millions about the realities of class power, politics and tactics went by the board.

The compromise met nearly universal opposition from progressive and left people. I don't know if anyone called it a "sellout," but they might as well have.

The question is: is this criticism warranted? In my view the answer is unequivocally – No.

What was the president's alternative given the balance of class and social forces in the capital and across the country at that time and later when the new Congress convenes in January?

What was the policy option given the right-wing Republican comeback, the political confusion of the American people and the weaknesses of the left and broader movement that the election results revealed?

To stand down Mitch McConnell and his gang would have been feasible, but only if a legislative alternative was available and only if millions of ordinary people, many of whom just voted for Republicans in the midterm elections, could be rallied to compel congressional Republicans to support that alternative – and let's not forget that all the while this is going on working people's

paychecks are shrinking and their unemployment benefits are evaporating.

Finding an alternative legislative package would be easy enough to come by.

But setting millions into motion in an organized fashion is a different kettle of fish. A snap of the fingers won't do it. Nor will a good slogan. Not

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even a presidential address.

It would depend in the end on the political and organizational capacity of the main social organizations, liberals, progressives, left thinking people, to activate millions – including many who voted Republican in November.

We don't need moral victories at this moment, but real ones. That is particularly the case for the unemployed who would have lost their benefits.

If the last two years have revealed anything to me, it is the left's ability to influence and bring into the streets millions in any sort of sustained way is limited.

While we don't set moral claims aside, it is imperative to take into account the balance of class and social forces at any given moment, our capacity to bring into motion masses of people, and our best guess of what can be realistically won.

If the last two years have revealed anything to me, it is the left's ability to influence and bring into the streets millions in any sort of sustained way is limited, and the political consciousness of the American people is contradictory and confused.

I wish that were not the case. Some blame the president for this situation, others the Democrats, but this is too easy. The president should take some responsibility, as should his party, for the present political, but shouldn't the left as well?

Over the past two years, don't we have to admit that the tea party has better communicated its message to millions, united its supporters, and expanded its bases of power than our side has?

For too long we have assumed that the American people are ready to embrace left solutions. If we, and especially Democrats, project them, "the people will come." Tell that to Russ Feingold! This is wishful thinking.

Notwithstanding the awful mess we are in, I don't see the system breaking down or people spontaneously rising up. In my view, the path to a progressive, and socialist, future will take long persistent work, flexible and broad tactics, and a sound strategic policy.

Moreover, the starting point – not the ending point – for such an effort is not some long-range vision or a left, or even progressive, program of action. They have a place. Ground zero, however, is the immediate struggles for economic relief that are stirring millions, and the overarching task of decisively defeating right-wing Republicanism in 2012 – something we didn't do in 2008.

the undermining of the public school system, the decay of urban and rural communities, the privatization of public assets, the growth of poverty and inequality, the hollowing out of the manufacturing sector and massive loss of jobs, the dismantling of regulations on corporate misbehavior, the lowering of workers' wages, the lifting of barriers inhibiting international capital flows, the imposition of unfair trade agreements, and a faltering - now stagnant - domestic economy.



Sam Webb is chair of Communist Party.

2011: Looming class warfare

By PW Editorial Board

2010 ended with praise of President Obama and the lame-duck Congress. In the waning hours of the 111th Congress, the Senate ratified the START treaty 71-26 and repealed "Don't ask, don't tell."

Also approved was a bill strengthening food safety, a multi-billion-dollar settlement of discrimination lawsuits by Black farmers and Native American Indians, and a health care bill for 9/11 first responders long blocked by Republicans.

Over GOP opposition, the Democrats pushed through a 13-month extension of jobless benefits and tax cuts for middle-income taxpayers.

The \$858 billion deal came at a price. Obama accepted a \$700 billion tax gift for the rich, which he long opposed, and a cut in the estate tax plus a 2 percent cut in Social Security withholding.

Critics charge that Obama gave up too much. Yet without the deal, real people's lives were on the line, if unemployment benefits were allowed to run out or workers were left with a cut in their take-home pay.

The weaknesses in all the reforms reflect the

balance of forces in the House and Senate and in the nation as a whole. The Republicans were determined to block or gut any progressive reform, and Democrats lacked the votes to break their obstructionist tactics. That strategy paid handsome dividends in the Nov. 2 election.

It offers a chilling harbinger of the class warfare the emboldened Republicans will wage in the New Year. Their first priority is outright repeal of health care reform. Also, they will try to kill the new Consumer Financial Protection Agency by denying it funds.

The GOP leadership vows to slash \$100 billion in health, education, environmental protection and other vital human needs funding. Their agenda includes repeal or privatization of Social Security, Medicare, our system of public education and higher education. They even call for elimination of the Department of Education and the Environmental Protection Agency.

We have no choice but to stand and fight back against this vicious plan.

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Justice says death penalty shot through with racism

By Jarvis Tyner

Recently retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens came out swinging against the death penalty. It is a remarkable and courageous shift in his opinion, after years of supporting it.

Stevens, who came to the court a Republican in 1975, was appointed by then-President Gerald Ford. But over the years, as the court shifted to the far-right, he became a part of the liberal wing.

Using blunt words, the retired justice said he once thought the death penalty could be administered “rationally and fairly.”

But the ex-justice now has concluded, “That personnel changes on the court, coupled with ‘regrettable judicial activism’, had created a system of capital punishment that is shot through with racism, skewed toward conviction, infected with politics and tinged with hysteria.”

Stevens is critical of the way politicians, including district attorneys and elected judges, use their support for the death penalty to win elections, and points out the deterrent argument is false.

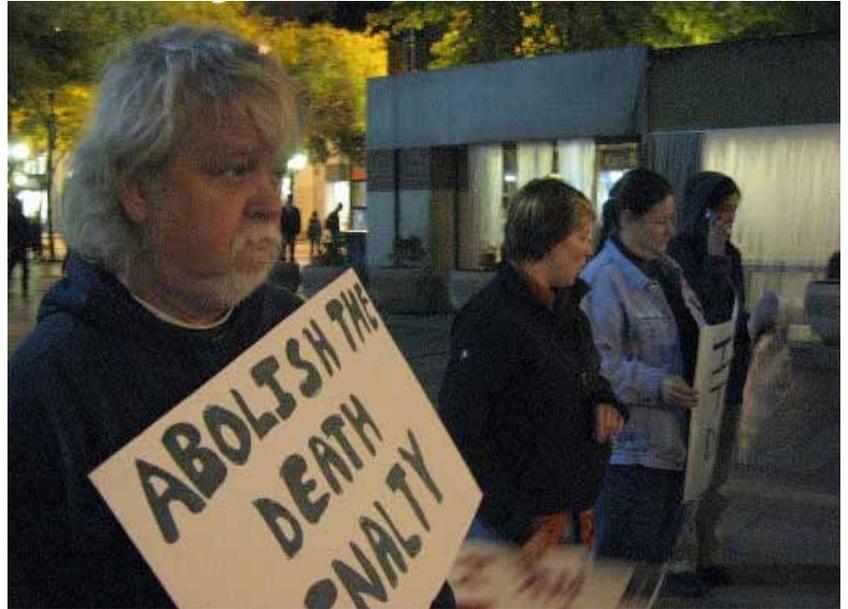
“Death penalty states have generally higher crime rates than ‘abolitionist’ ones,” Stevens says.

Stevens does not hold back on how racism plays a major role.

He says the court took “wrong turns” in deciding how juries in death penalty cases are chosen; what evidence they may hear; in not looking closely enough at racial disparities in the capital justice system; in failing to police the role of politics can play in decisions to seek and impose the death penalty.

Stevens said, “We would all be better off if we simply did away with the death penalty like most civilized countries have done.”

Since 1973, more than 130 people have been



freed from death row, most based on DNA evidence.

Michelle Alexander, author of “The New Jim Crow,” says “people of all races use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates,” and cites studies to prove the point.

Yet, blacks and Latinos get arrested at a higher rate and receive longer sentences for lesser or equal crimes than whites. That’s one major factor in how our country got the disgraceful human rights nightmare of black males constituting over half of the U.S. prison population.

And when you disproportionately entrap and incarcerate massive numbers of mainly poor, working class youth of color, you take away their right to vote (in many states) and to get a job for the rest of their lives.

It really does matter who occupies the White House and the U.S. Congress; who appoints judges and passes legislation.

Change is still urgent, and the struggle must continue.

Since 1973, more than 130 people have been freed from death row, most based on DNA evidence.

Texas students strike for DREAM Act

By Vivian Weinstein

SAN ANTONIO - Thirteen Texas students carrying out a hunger strike here have reached their 15th day. They are pushing for Congress to pass the DREAM Act.

The bill (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act) was first introduced into Congress in 2001.

The hunger strike at the University of Texas in San Antonio is part of a series of strikes, rallies and candlelight vigils at universities across the state.

The students have brought a sense of urgency and a deeper level of commitment to the movement, as undocumented students are coming out into the open, risking deportation and possibly death.

The United Methodist Church and First United Unitarian Church of San Antonio have lent support, in addition to community organizations.

Thirty Texas Catholic nuns from various orders and congregations sent a letter to Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, calling on her to meet with the hunger strike students.

Some years ago Sen. Hutchison supported the DREAM Act. Not so in the Congress of 2010.

On November 18, a group of undocumented youth met with Sen. Hutchison and brought a message from the San Antonio hunger strikers.

She refused to make a statement of support for the DREAM Act, claiming her interest in a visa process instead of legislation.

Readers can contact Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and ask her to meet with the striking students.

¿Posible para pasar el Dream Act?

Por Wilmer Barzallo

BROOKLYN, N.Y. - "El tiempo es ahora. Aunque los resultados de las elecciones no son lo que deseamos; sabemos que todavía tenemos el poder de reparar nuestro sistema migratorio porque es la correcta cosa que hay que hacer". Con estas palabras inició su intervención la congresista Nidia M. Velázquez (demócrata, Nueva York) en un encuentro con la comunidad en la Iglesia Santa Brigida de Brooklyn el pasado domingo 21 de noviembre.

El evento fué organizado por Make The Road New York cuya co-directora ejecutiva Ana María Archilla enfatizó el poder de las comunidades "para transformar la sociedad". "Vamos a luchar para que la justicia sea posible aquí en Brooklyn, Queens y en todo Nueva York ... y en el país entero" señaló. En el encuentro con los congresistas participaron varias autoridades locales y organizaciones comunitarias que se enfocaron en el problema migratorio en los EEUU. Anjelo Orellana, coordinador internacional del Frente Unido de Inmigrantes Ecuatorianos (FUIE) dijo que la reforma migratoria es algo justo y necesario "... y no vamos a descansar hasta poder lograr no solamente el Dream Act, sino la legalización de todos y cada uno de los inmigrantes... , queremos una reforma migratoria integral".

El nutrido y diverso auditorio congregado en la Iglesia de Santa Brigida se enfervorizó con las diver-

sas participaciones y sobre todo con las intervenciones de los congresistas Velázquez y Luis Gutiérrez que enfatizaron la necesidad de de pasar el Dream Act "como una cuota inicial de pago de la Reforma Migratoria" antes de final de año, y antes que los republicanos asuman en enero la mayoría en la Cámara de Representantes. "La ventana de oportunidad está cerrándose, sin embargo no descansaremos hasta que pase el Dream Act.", dijo Velázquez.

Gutiérrez fué claro al demandar del Presidente Obama poner fin a las deportaciones. De acuerdo a estudios existen más de 4 millones de niños estadounidenses cuyos padres son indocumentados. "¿Cuál es la política del gobierno americano?" preguntaba el congresista Gutiérrez "¿Dar a esos niños asistencia médica? ¿Darles mejor vivienda? ¿Darles mejor educación? ¡No! ¡Es llevarse a sus padres!. ¡Esto es equivocado! ¡Presidente Obama pare la deportaciones! ¡Termínelas ahora!". El congresista Gutiérrez señaló que el Presidente Obama tenía la autoridad para hacerlo "de un solo plumazo".

Gutiérrez hizo también un llamado a los inmigrantes que si tienen documentados a sentirse "indignados ante el atropello que sufren aquellos menos afortunados que nosotros", hizo un llamado a dejar sus comodidades, " a sacrificar su propia libertad para que otros pueden vivir libres aquí en éste país".

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