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Debt panel to workers: Drop Dead!

By John Wojcik



The Nov. preliminary report from the federal budget deficit commission “tells working Americans to ‘Drop Dead,’” according to Richard Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO.

“It is unconscionable to be proposing cuts to the critical economic lifelines for working people, Social Security and Medicare.”

Trumka rejected even the idea that the commission’s preliminary report, prepared by co-chairs Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles, is just a “starting point.”

“Let me be clear,” Trumka said. “It is not.”

The report calls for deep spending cuts in programs, reduced Social Security benefits, a higher retirement age, tax code changes, including reduced corporate tax rates and lower tax rates for the wealthy, along with tax cuts for middle and low income workers.

It also calls for a 10 percent cut in the Pentagon budget, historically a sacred cow to lawmakers. None of the military spending for the two deficit-feeding wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is included.

“The report shows the commission is running severely off the track,” declared John Irons, policy director at the Economic Policy Institute. “Nearly half of the adjustments come from cuts to discre-

tionary spending - a portion of the budget that is not responsible for long-term deficits. The suggested reductions include a wide range of cuts that would cost jobs and increase financial burdens on working families.”

Irons said a major flaw in the report is that, ignoring high unemployment and the expectation that jobless rates will remain high for several years, it initiates huge spending cuts in 2012.

“It does not allow enough time for the econ-

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omy to recover, nor does it call for the policies necessary to get the economy back on track,” he said. “The spending reduction of over \$68 billion in 2012, ramping up to \$140 billion in 2015, would mean a slower economy and higher unemployment for an already weakened labor market.”

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The labor movement is saying that a serious effort to fix the economy requires a focus, instead, on eliminating what it says is the real deficit in the country - the jobs deficit.

“Working families already paid for the Wall Street’s party that tanked our economy,” Trumka said. “If we actually want to address our economic problems, we need to end tax breaks that send American jobs overseas and invest in creating jobs by rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure and green technologies.” The commission’s final report, due Dec. 1, must be approved by 14 of the 18 commission members. If it is, it will go to Congress for a vote before the end of the year.

As it stands, the report may not get the support of 14 commission members. Nancy Pelosi joined opposition voiced by several commission members Nov. 10 .

“This is not a package that I could support,” said commission member Rep. Jan Schakowsky, an Illinois Democrat. “Seniors have spent their working lives paying for these benefits and we owe them what was promised. Worsening the

situation, the co-chairs propose to increase out-of-pocket costs for Medicare beneficiaries who already spend more than 30 percent of their income on health care. The gap between rich and poor has never been greater in our country. These proposals will only make the situation worse.”

Sen. Bernie Sanders, said “It is reprehensible to ask working people, including many who do physically-demanding labor, to work until they are 69 years of age. As they compete for jobs with 25-year-olds, many older workers will go unemployed and have virtually no income.”

Sanders called upon the American people to “vigorously oppose the Simpson-Bowles deficit reduction plan. The huge increase in the national debt in recent years was caused by two unpaid wars, tax breaks for the wealthy, a Medicare prescription drug bill written by the pharmaceutical industry, and the Wall Street bailout. Unlike Social Security, none of these proposals was paid for.”



John Wojcik writes for the People’s World.

Time to end stop-and-frisk policing

By PW Editorial Board

Claiming gross violations of constitutional rights, the American Civil Liberties Union of Philadelphia filed suit against the city police department’s stop-and-frisk policies. The policing measures are targeted at Philadelphia’s African American and Latino population. The lawsuit, Bailey, et al. v. City of Philadelphia, et al., is similar to one filed two years ago by the Center for Constitutional Rights against New York City police.

The ACLU and Center for Constitutional Rights are right: In both cases hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of young black and brown men - the overwhelming majority of whom have committed no crime - are routinely racially profiled and frisked by police,.

And the numbers are escalating. Last year in Philadelphia 253,333 persons were stopped, as compared to 102,319 the year before. Over 70 percent of them were black. Only 8 percent of those were arrested.

In New York City, 315,483 were stopped in 2004. Last year the figure escalated to 575,304. Some 85 percent of these individuals were never

charged with any crime.

The searches, purportedly done to seize illegal weapons, have produced almost zero results: 0.15 handguns out 100 stops, says the Center for Constitutional Rights.

What it has produced is feeling of living in a state of siege in African American and Latino communities across the country. The racial profiling tactics of immigration authorities must also be added to the picture.

The ongoing criminalization of large sections of our country’s youth continues to tug at if not unravel the national fabric, creating distrust and despair.

The ugly racist and anti-immigrant overtones in the Big Business/tea party fall campaign is fed by and in turns feeds these policies.

Racial profiling is against the law. It is anti-worker and affects black, brown, Asian and white unemployed and employed.

It must be stopped, in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, in the state of Arizona: wherever it rears its ugly head.

Racial profiling is against the law. It is anti-worker and affects black, brown, Asian and white unemployed and employed.

Riders say, give us back our buses!

By Marilyn Bechtel

Alia Phelps is a medical assistant who works weekends. After service cuts made earlier this year by AC Transit - the bus company serving Alameda and Contra Costa counties, across the bay from San Francisco - "it's really hard getting to the hospital now," Phelps said.

The cutbacks, which AC Transit says it had to make because it faces a \$56 million budget shortfall, are affecting Phelps' family as well. She can't take her 5-year-old daughter to the reading program at an area community college, and family shopping expeditions and other outings must be scheduled during the day on weekdays because evening and weekend services have been reduced.

Phelps, a member of the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), was among over 150 bus riders who gathered in downtown Oakland Nov. 9 to call for restoring service..

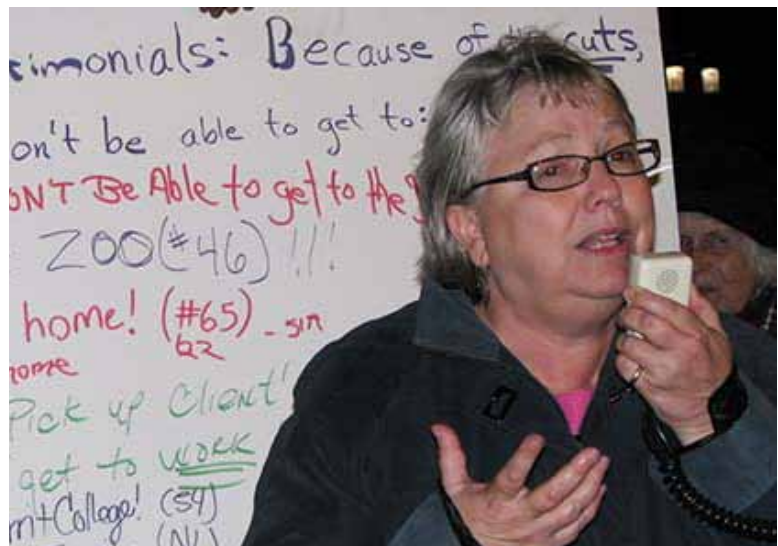
Two service cuts this year have already reduced services by some 15 percent.

Demonstrators were encouraged to learn that a proposed third set of cutbacks had been avoided at least temporarily.

Disabled riders are among those most sharply affected by the changes. Roy Womack, a community organizer said residents in the organization's shelter in neighboring Berkeley now face an eight-block walk to the nearest bus lines.

ACCE, BOSS, and other community and environmental organizations are calling on area elected officials to pledge to do everything they can to fight the continuing cuts and fare hikes, to work to restore AC Transit's service to pre-2010 levels, and to fight against the "gradual diversion of AC Transit's resources."

Before signing a giant poster bearing the pledge, Gayle McLaughlin, recently reelected mayor of nearby Richmond, said many of her



constituents depend on buses and she is hearing about the serious problems the cuts are causing. "We don't need to keep widening our highways," she told the crowd. "That only impacts public health with more pollution and drives us further into the global warming crisis. Let's keep pulling together for transportation justice!"

Also signing the pledge were representatives of California Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner and Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson. Carson called in addition for fair pay and benefits for workers, assuring proper maintenance, and focusing on "areas and people who are transit-dependent."

During the summer AC Transit had sought to force a new contract with significant givebacks on 1,750 drivers and mechanics. But their union, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 192, fought off the attempt. An arbitrated agreement signed this week includes changes to work rules, health and benefit plans which the agency said would help reduce the deficit. Demonstrators expressed appreciation for the role the workers' sacrifices played in staving off the cuts.

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Texas student vigil for DREAM Act

By Brandon Berrios

Your voice is your power!" yelled student activist Emmanuel Faz to a crowd at the University of Texas campus here. The students met in front of the university library late in the evening Nov. 9 to show their support for the DREAM Act.

The UT students gathered around a poster where they each placed an imprint of their palm. Beneath, each wrote their name and a dream they hope to achieve. Most of the students were wearing red shirts and glow-stick bracelets. Later they later joined their bracelets together to symbolize the joining and cooperation that will be necessary to pass the DREAM Act.

A series of speakers addressed the crowd to generate support for the bill and let people know how they can make a difference for the cause. The DREAM Act was first introduced in Congress on August 1, 2001, and has since been struggling to be passed. The bill lost by 900 votes last time, according to Emmanuel Faz.

The "Dream Team," an organization of student activists in North Texas working to help pass the DREAM Act, will be fasting for five days.

Nicole Ano Nuevo, a member of LULAC and a student at UT Arlington, says this is the last chance to get the DREAM Act passed, before the Republicans take control of Congress in January. She urges everyone to contact their representative and do their part to get this bill passed.

The event ended with the passing out of postcards that could be signed and mailed to congressional representatives.

Cumbre de la G-20: EEUU contra el mundo?

Por Alberto Ampuero

Anticipándose a la Cumbre de los Presidentes del G-20 que se reúne en Seúl (Corea del Sur), Estados Unidos decidió unilateralmente el 5 de noviembre una gigantesca emisión de billetes por 600 mil millones de dólares para la compra de bonos del Tesoro.

La medida se conoce como Flexibilización Cuantitativa ("Quantitative Easing" QE, por sus siglas en inglés) porque aumenta la cantidad de dinero en los bancos.

El objetivo declarado de la medida consiste en que los bancos den créditos, que el mayor volumen de dinero en circulación aumente la demanda interna y que las empresas contraten nuevo personal para satisfacerla. De esta forma, se espera que el nuevo programa consolide el proceso de recuperación de la economía, al promover el crédito y la inversión.

Pero lo que es bueno para Estados Unidos es malo para el mundo, que reaccionó con críticas al plan de reactivación económica de "la Fed" (Banco de la Reserva Federal de EEUU), en particular por China, Alemania y Brasil. Esta política, que se conoce como activar la máquina de imprimir dinero, provocaría una depreciación del dólar a nivel general, y la mejora en la competitividad norteamericana frente a la europea.

Aun así, Ben Bernanke, el actual Presidente de la Reserva Federal de

EEUU, y su equipo defienden su apuesta. "la Fed" tiene dos mandatos, dice. "Por un lado el pleno empleo, por otro mantener la inflación en torno al 2%. La inflación está baja, pero la economía no se reanima con la rapidez que sería deseable: La compra de deuda persigue que eso cambie".

El mes pasado, el ministro de finanzas brasileño advirtió contra el estallido de una guerra monetaria global y durante este mes el gobierno anunció la duplicación de un impuesto sobre compras extranjeras de bonos brasileños en un intento de detener el ingreso acelerado de capital y el aumento relativo de la moneda nacional, el real. Tailandia adoptó pasos similares la semana pasada.

El encuentro del G-20 se ve como una oportunidad para que los líderes de los países que representan 85 por ciento del producto mundial eviten que se extiendan las "guerras de divisas" y se conviertan en una ola de proteccionismo que podría poner en peligro la recuperación global.

El G20, fundado en 1999, es un grupo de ministros de finanzas y gobernadores de bancos centrales de 20 economías: 19 países más la Unión Europea. Lo integran Alemania, Arabia Saudita, Argentina, Australia, Brasil, Canadá, China, Corea, Estados Unidos, Francia, India, Indonesia, Italia, Japón, México, Reino Unido, Rusia, Sudáfrica, Turquía y la Unión Europea como bloque.

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