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Labor opens membership to everyone

By Mark Gruenberg

Starting to put into practice its new goal of speaking for all workers, not just representing those in unions, the AFL-CIO and its Working America affiliate announced Oct. 23 that the affiliate will expand its operations to all 50 states within five years.

The aim, said Working America executive director Karen Nussbaum and AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka, is to enlist more allies who share labor's goals and views on issues such as immigration reform, restoring the middle class and workers' rights, even if they can't or won't join unions.

"The hard work of broadening and building a more inclusive labor movement is currently underway," Trumka declared during an Oct. 23 telephone press conference.

Working America now has 3.2 million members and its staffers go door-to-door, house-to-house in states mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, engaging workers and their families about their problems and discussing political action and grassroots organizing to solve them. They do not sign up members for local unions.

In its convention in Los Angeles in September, the federation voted to expand that effort and to convert the AFL-CIO from just an organization of labor unions, councils, federations and locals to a workers' movement, organized and unorganized.



Delegates also voted to reach out to like-minded progressive groups: Women's rights groups, environmentalists, civil rights groups, community coalitions, religious/spiritual groups, and African-African, Hispanic, and LGBT groups.

Nussbaum explained Working America will expand to every state - a request state labor federations made a year ago - and seek ways to contact those non-union workers not just at home but in their workplaces. In the next year, she said, her

T H I S W E E K :

- Labor opens membership to everyone
- Now is time for action
- Cafeteria workers say no to layoffs
- Nuevo impulso para iniciar la reforma migratoria
- Ohio unionists call for Social Security march

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group will add 11 states, with a major push in two states in the notoriously anti-worker anti-union South, Texas and North Carolina.

"We're developing new forms of advocacy and customizing our outreach programs by working with (union) affiliates" such as state federations,

Working America will expand its operations to all 50 states.

she said. She cited one example in New Mexico, where Working America and the Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE) teamed up on a fight to raise the minimum wage in Albuquerque, and to improve working conditions for theatrical workers statewide.

But Working America is also going to shift its focus “from policy” in general “to policy affecting them in the workplace, such as raising the minimum wage, safety and health and unpredictable scheduling,” she said. “And we’ll give them tools, outside of collective bargaining, to get redress” or justice on the job, Nussbaum added.

Working America will also establish new “Workers Centers.” Those will be its own offices where workers can meet, off their jobsites, to talk about issues and to receive practical legal and other help. The first such center will be in Portland, Ore. “And we’re recruiting people for a Volunteer Corps to spend much more time with members on the issues,” she said. There will be special emphasis on new members.

Working America will also ask current union members to enlist in the cause. It wants them to reach out to friends and family members on common issues, saying members could sponsor the

others for Working America’s inexpensive fees.

But Working America won’t work in a vacuum. Nussbaum noted the state feds asked it to come in and promised cooperation. And when asked about which worker groups would be part of the Southern emphasis, Trumka mentioned teachers and educational staffers in Texas, but quickly added that “We’ll work with our affiliates (unions) there, not getting ahead of them.”

Individual AFL-CIO unions will also get involved in the outreach effort, Trumka predicted, citing the Ironworkers as an example. Ironworkers vice president Bernie Evers told the conference call his union is now going out to talk with non-union ironworkers, without recruiting them into the local first.

It brings them into the union hall or into community groups’ quarters for informal sessions about their rights on the job and the problems - from immigration issues to health and safety questions - that they face. From those sessions, the union gathers names and contacts for a database. It also offers advanced training.



Mark Gruenberg edits Press Associates Inc.

Now is the time for action

By PW Editorial Board

A victory was won by the President when right-wing extremists in Congress were forced to back down and allow a vote to raise the debt ceiling and re-open government. However, this is an ongoing battle. A conference committee has been established as part of the compromise with a December 13 reportback date to propose a new budget. Rep Paul Ryan is already discussing cuts to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, one of the great defenders of democracy and the people, is also on the conference committee. His tour of the South has exposed the fact that these programs have support in the heart of districts where members of Congress threaten to cut them.

Mass action and millions of voices are needed now to demand: End the sequester. Protect and expand Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid. Pass the People’s Budget submitted by the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Another top issue before Congress is comprehensive immigration reform with legalization, a path to citizenship and workers’ rights. As Rep Grijalva says, “we cannot kick the can down the road anymore. We’re making things worse by doing nothing.”

Here are some things you can do:

Call the White House (202-456-1111). Leave a message for President Obama: Thank you for standing firm against the Tea Party. No grand bargains that cut Social Security.

Ask your local elected officials to compile a list of how people are being hurt by the sequester and make it public, as a pressure on Congress and as an organizing tool. Help build support for the Sanchez (HR 3118) and Harkin (S 567) bills to strengthen Social Security by increasing benefits and COLA. Learn more about the Strengthening Social Security Act here. To ask your Representative to co-sponsor the bill, go here. Sign the AFL CIO petition for a roadmap to citizenship.

Mass action and millions of voices are needed.

Cafeteria workers say no to layoffs



By John Wojcik

Parents, teachers, students and cafeteria workers cheered the decision by Chicago Public Schools last summer to replace frozen, canned and pre-plated meals with fresh food.

They are decidedly unhappy, however, about the results of a CPS decision just two weeks short of school opening to lay off 200 lunchroom workers.

The reason for the unhappiness is simple, said 20 year lunchroom worker Linda Green: “We have worked hard to get fresh food in the schools, but cooking food from scratch requires more workers, not fewer.”

Lunchroom workers rallied outside the CPS headquarters on Food Day, Oct. 24 reminding the public that it was their “Let’s Cook” campaign that helped usher in an era of commitment to cooking fresh food.

A new survey by Unite Here, Local 1, the union that represents the workers, shows that 62 percent of respondents say their students like the food better this year compared to last.

Workers, teachers and parents, however, say the lunchroom cuts are causing big problems.

Some 53 percent of respondents reported that the lines of students waiting to be served are longer this year than last.

Nearly 60 percent of respondents who regularly see students in line said that the last student receiving food on average has less than 15 minutes to eat before having to be back in class. The USDA stipulates a minimum of 20 minutes for students to be sitting down and eating lunch.

Lunch rooms are not as clean as they were last year. Some 59 percent of respondents said they had less time to clean the lunch room this year compared to last year.

Some 43 percent of lunchroom workers have gone an entire day this year without a break. Fully one fourth have worked off the clock without pay.

“CPS lunchroom workers take great pride in their jobs and the food they serve to children every day,” said Carly Karmel, a spokesperson for Unite Here.

The demonstration Thursday was one of more than 2,000 Food Day events that took place across the country.

“We are doing whatever it takes to make sure our students are fed,” said Green. “But this isn’t sustainable. We’re doing our best, but the bottom line is that we need more staff.”

Lunchroom cuts are causing big problems.

Ohio unionists call for Social Security march

By Bruce Bostick

While the Republican-led government shutdown continued, two Ohio union groups, in addition to passing unanimous resolutions to reopen the government, signed on to a national plan to march on Washington D.C. to demand passage of the 'Strengthen Social Security Act,' (HR 3117/S 567) and legislation to put people to work rebuilding the nation's crumbling infrastructure.

The annual Ohio SOAR (Steelworker's Organization of Active Retirees) Conference and then the Central Ohio AFL-CIO Central Labor Federation passed resolutions demanding that the AFL-CIO, working with allies, organize a "truly massive march on Washington, D.C." in order to push for those demands.

"Retirees are sick & tired of being scapegoats for these politicians in Washington," said Willie Moore, Ohio USW/SOAR executive board member. "Social Security recipients and pensioners have already been hit hard. Companies have stolen pensions, with help from the same folks that now say they want to 'save' Social Security!" These same folks now say they want to 'help us,' by cutting Social Security. We didn't cause this crisis, the wealthy did, and we're not going to sit by and let them use it as an excuse to attack retirees again. We all need to stand up together, let we did in the old days, to win!"

The union passed resolutions called for passage of the Strengthen Social Security Act.

Nuevo impulso para iniciar la reforma migratoria

Por Emile Schepers

El 2 de octubre, la dirección del Partido Demócrata en la Cámara de Representantes presentó su propio proyecto de ley de reforma migratoria, HR 15, la Ley de Modernización de la Seguridad Fronteriza de Oportunidades Económica y de Inmigración.

Este proyecto de ley está modificado en parte en la Ley del Senado 744, pero omite una de las partes más criticadas de la legislación del Senado, es decir, la modificación Corker - Hoeven lo que aumentaría en gran medida la militarización de la frontera Estados Unidos- México.

El 15 de octubre, el presidente Obama anunció que se enfocaría ahora en la reforma migratoria, y que quería un proyecto de ley para firmarlo antes de finales del 2013. En la Cámara, el hecho de que el cierre del gobierno y amenaza del no pago de las deudas del gobierno condujeron a divisiones dentro del Partido Republicano y el debilitamiento de la mano del presidente de la Cámara John Boehner y su partido, es visto como alentador. Hasta ahora, el que no haya existido progreso en la Cámara sobre la reforma migratoria se ha dado porque Boehner ha insistido en que no se llama a ninguna legislación a votación a menos que una mayoría de la Asamblea Republicana de 234 miembros de la Cámara esté de acuer-

do, no sólo la mayoría de los Cámara, incluyendo demócratas. Esto significaba que la única manera en que un proyecto de ley podría ser llevado a votación sería a través de un inusual y difícil de alcanzar procedimiento llamado una "petición de descarga", en la que la mayoría de los miembros de la cámara (217) firmaría una petición pidiendo el proyecto de ley para ser considerado por toda la Cámara.

Un verano de intenso cabildeo de los congresistas republicanos con el movimiento de los derechos de los inmigrantes, junto con manifestaciones en 80 ciudades, el 5 de octubre y una marcha masiva en Washington el 8 de octubre, ha producido el resultado de que suficiente republicanos y demócratas estén ahora señalando que apoyarán un proyecto de ley de reforma migratoria que se cumpla. Sin embargo, los elementos del partido del té (tea party) están tan furiosos por haber perdido la lucha por el cierre del gobierno que están jurando vengarse de Obama bloqueando la reforma de inmigración. ¡Pero para partir, ellos estaban en contra de ella! Mientras tanto, continúan las protestas contra la política agresiva del gobierno de Obama de arrestos y deportaciones de inmigrantes indocumentados, con la desobediencia civil en Tucson, San Francisco y otros lugares.

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