

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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December 21, 2013

Celebrating Mandela's life

By Mark Waller



The death of Nelson Mandela on December 5th at the age of 95 and after prolonged bouts of illness hardly came as a surprise. It was a gentle touchdown to a hard reality that years earlier had vexed many: what will happen when Madiba goes? What will we do?

Had he died suddenly while still president, or in dubious circumstances when he was obviously in robust health, the fears that still raw social tensions would erupt violently would seem grounded.

But Madiba's decline allowed for a sense of placid transition between him being here and no longer with us. Feelings of loss more readily mix with a sense of affirmation.

This is the mood at many of the township and village gatherings held over the last few days. Though the country faces massive challenges to end poverty, inequality and underdevelopment, it has come a long way on these counts, and Mandela is readily associated with the good that has happened.

This all contrasts with the wall-to-wall TV and radio tributes broadcast unrelentingly. They tend to offer a teary send-off for Mandela, steeped in muzak, the touchy-feely bromides of celebrities, and cursory historical accounts that gloss over Mandela's radical career.

But on the street, outside the Mandela homes in Soweto and Johannesburg, people gathered to sing freedom songs, and to dance (you can't do the one without the other). The same has been happening in other parts of the country, in townships and villages.

People packed the stadium in the far-flung Limpopo rural township of Malamulele in the north of the country on Sunday. The atmosphere was hardly sombre, and all the more poignant for

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its mix of mourning and celebration of a revolutionary life that helped win South Africa its freedom from apartheid.

It's not all raucous celebration. Many areas are quiet as daily life goes on, though less frenetically than usual. People are taking things in their

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stride.

In the once staunchly white working-class suburb of Pretoria North, just outside South Africa's administrative capital, the congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church held services and to commemorate Mandela's achievements. These began the day after the announcement of his death.

The Dutch Reformed Church was traditionally a bastion of apartheid values, renounced and denounced as the church reinvented itself. It was a reinvention made possible largely by Mandela's resolute strategy of reconciliation prior to and in the wake of the first democratic elections in 1994.

Pretoria North is now a shadow of its miserable past. It's a lower-middle and working class suburb where black and white people have socially integrated to a level that far exceeds wealthier areas. There have been continuous services and vigils in other churches in the area and in the large nearby townships of Soshanguve, Winterfeldt and Mabopane. Most are charisma (holiness) churches, preaching born again Christianity, and here the up-tempo gospel songs and sermons have

been celebrating Mandela.

Swarms of heads of state and other dignitaries will descend on South Africa to attend Mandela's state funeral, and the period of national mourning will shift into another gear.

But recent days have shown South Africa coming to terms with the loss of Mandela on its own terms, and in ways showing that most people here see South Africa as a better place because of what Mandela did and stood for.

Had the country's transformation failed - and the bourgeois commercial media in South Africa spend most of the time telling people that it has - it is hardly likely Mandela would be celebrated the way he is in poor or less well off areas here.

Perhaps this more than anything gives the lie to the musings of Slavoj Zizek that Mandela's legacy was one of "bitter defeat". In fact a recent Gallup poll of South Africans showed that 91 percent felt that their families were better off than now than during apartheid.



Mark Waller writes for Peoplesworld.org.

A handshake that shook the world

By PW Editorial Board

In the spirit of Nelson Mandela, President Obama stopped and shook the hand of Cuban President Raul Castro at the memorial to Mandela in South Africa.

Instantly and predictably, the U.S. far-right Republicans and their mouthpieces went crazy. Now, nobody in their right mind could argue with following the example Mandela set of talking, negotiating and finally reconciling with one's enemies, especially when history has moved to a new stage.

But nobody said the tea party types are in their right mind. More important, the idea that Cuba is the "enemy" of the United States is a relic of the last century's Cold War and needs to be finally thrown on the ash heap of history. Not just the idea, but also the numerous anti-Cuba policies, starting with the U.S. embargo and travel ban. History has indeed moved to a new stage

and it is time for our policy to reflect that. It is heartening to see the Obama administration ease the most extreme Bush-era sanctions against our neighbor. Much more needs to be done.

U.S. anti-Cuba policies have hurt our own economy and isolated our country from the rest of the world, in particular the countries of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean. The United States stands out like a sore thumb, the only country in the hemisphere that does not have normal relations with the socialist island 90 miles from Florida's shores. It was a handshake that shook the world, fittingly done at Mandela's memorial. Yes, Mr. President, let us all honor Mandela's legacy - a man whom you rightfully described as understanding "the ties that bind the human spirit" - and finally establish neighborly ties to Cuba.

Let us all honor Mandela's legacy and finally establish neighborly ties to Cuba.

Michigan residents fast for immigration reform

By John Rummel

Cindy Garcia delivered a heartfelt plea on behalf of her husband as she fasted during the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Dec. 12. “We’ve lobbied, we’ve marched we’ve done everything we can to make sure my husband Jorge, who now faces deportation, stays where he belongs, with us,” she said.

Garcia was one of more than 45 labor and immigrant rights activists across Michigan who undertook a 24 hour fast for citizenship and immigration reform. The fast started Wednesday evening and ended 24 hours later on Thursday evening.

Garcia said Jorge, now 35, was ten when he came to the United States. Her lobbying and marching took her, and the couples’ two youngest children, ages eight and 11, to Washington and Capitol Hill where for several days there they participated in the ongoing fast for immigration reform.

Garcia, a member of United Auto Workers who works at Dearborn Truck Plant, spoke at a press conference Thursday at the International Institute in Detroit. The event was sponsored by Michigan United, a statewide coalition working for immigration reform.

She said a 24-hour fast is a “small sacrifice” to make this holiday season.

Too many holiday dinners will have “an empty place at the table,” said Michigan United organizer Miriam Cuevas. She pointed out that every day Republican Speaker John Boehner and the House of Representatives refuse to act, 1100 immigrants are deported.

“This issue is personal. I am a dreamer,” Cuevas said. She has temporary protection from deportation under the president’s executive order called DACA, but she said, “every day and every hour I worry” about what will happen when the protection expires.



It’s also a personal issue for Seydi Sarr, of the Senegalese Association of Michigan. Sarr and others fought and lost the deportation case of local Senegalese artist Michel Mendy. In 2010, he was shot while a bystander during a robbery. Instead of going after the robber, the police detained him and turned him over to Immigration and Custom Enforcement. Though he had been in the country since 1998, he was deported earlier this year

Adding to Sarr’s concerns is the violence Mendy may encounter because he is gay. He is forced to live “in hiding” in his native Senegal, where being gay puts one’s life at serious risk, she said.

The process of fasting turns direct action into social action, said Prasanna Vengadam, president of South Asian American Voices for Impact. The hoped for end result of that social action, a path to citizenship, would benefit the nation as a whole, she said. She made the point that immigrants add to and help modernize our nation’s economy thereby making our nation stronger.

“You are giving up on America if you don’t support immigration reform,” she said.

What is the cost to our nation’s economy? It means a “\$3 trillion loss” over the next ten years, said Raquel Garcia-Anderson, a Michigan United organizer.

45 activists undertook a 24-hour fast for citizenship and immigration reform.

Domino's agrees to reinstate 25 fired in New York

Special to the World

Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman announced an agreement to reinstate workers whose employment with a Domino's pizza store ended suddenly Saturday night, following a wage dispute with store management. All 25 workers will be reinstated by Sunday at the latest. "Because of this agreement, 25 workers will be back to work in time for the holidays," said Attorney General Schneiderman. "New York's labor laws exist to ensure the protection and fair treatment of employees in the workplace. My office will take swift action where there is any indication that an employer may have retaliated against workers for complaining about illegal labor conditions."

The dispute in this case focused on employees' complaints, which they shared with management, that they were being paid a "tipped" wage for spending excessive time performing untipped kitchen work. Under New York law, employees who regularly receive tips may be paid a lower hourly wage and the employer may claim a "tip credit," providing certain circumstances are met.

Currently, the tip credit for delivery workers is \$1.60 per hour, so they must be paid at least \$5.65 per hour in wages. However, in order to ensure that the lower wage applies only to those who genuinely have the opportunity to receive tips, state and federal laws limit the amount of time a lower-paid, tipped employee may perform untipped work, such as cleaning or kitchen work.

Chile: la promesa de profundas transformaciones

Por Prensa Latina

La contundente victoria de la exmandataria Michelle Bachelet en la segunda vuelta de las elecciones presidenciales en Chile sitúa al país a las puertas de profundas transformaciones sociales, de cumplirse su programa de gobierno.

Poco después de conocerse la arrasadora victoria en la tarde-noche del domingo, Bachelet reiteró su voluntad de llevar adelante los cambios de fondo prometidos, en la mayoría de los casos emanados de las principales demandas que en los últimos años los movimientos sociales llevaron a la calle. "Se trata de un triunfo de envergadura histórica para las fuerzas de izquierda y progresistas en general", declaró a Prensa Latina el presidente del partido Izquierda Ciudadana, Víctor Osorio, cuya agrupación es parte del pacto opositor Nueva Mayoría, el que postuló a la expresidenta (2006-2010).

De acuerdo con el periodista y político, la contundencia del triunfo sobre la candidata de la Alianza de la derecha chilena, Evelyn Matthei, y sobre todo lo que ella representa, asegura la profundidad de los cambios estructurales que Bachelet y Nueva Mayoría se proponen acometer.

En opinión de Osorio, el 62,16 por ciento de los votos a favor de la exmandataria evidencia que la inmensa mayoría de los ciudadanos que concurrieron a las urnas se identifica

con las propuestas del bloque, que buscan edificar un nuevo país, que deje atrás la intensa desigualdad existente y permita aflorar la equidad. Poco después de conocerse la victoria, Bachelet reiteró las prioridades del que será su Gobierno a partir del 11 de marzo, cuando recibirá de vuelta la banda presidencial que hace cuatro años ella misma traspasó al presidente Sebastián Piñera.

Entre sus propuestas, remarcó la voluntad de emprender una profunda reforma educacional y avanzar hacia una nueva Constitución.

"Gracias a los jóvenes se ha manifestado con fuerza las ansias de construir un sistema educativo público (...) esa bandera la tomamos entre todos. Hoy ya nadie duda de que el lucro no puede ser el motor de la educación", expresó la expresidenta (2006-2010). Bachelet insistió en que la educación no es una mercancía, porque los sueños no son un bien de mercado. "Es un derecho de todos y de todas", exclamó. Según la mandataria electa, la nueva Constitución debe asegurar más derechos, y garantizar que en el futuro la mayoría nunca más será callada por una minoría. "Una Constitución que se transforme en el paso social nuevo, moderno y renovado que Chile demanda y necesita, que sea la base de una nueva relación entre las instituciones y la ciudadanía", apostilló.

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