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Despite Christmas hiring, unemployment rate jumps

By John Wojcik

Just as Nero fiddled while Rome burned, the GOP pushed for tax breaks for billionaires Dec. 3, even as the Labor Department issued a dire report: The official unemployment rate rose last month to 9.8 percent, meaning the jobless rate has been 9 percent or more for the last 19 months - the longest it has been this high since World War II.

Rather than seeing a scramble in Washington, D.C., to address this national emergency, on the day of the bad news Republicans blocked restoration of unemployment benefits for the millions out of work for more than 26 weeks.

More than 890,000 people lost their unemployment benefits in the 48-hour period that began at midnight, Dec. 1. The figure is going up by the minute and will surpass two million in the days ahead if Republicans continue to stall.

Almost as shocking as the GOP's callousness, is the lack of knowledge many Republicans have about the jobless benefits they are blocking.

Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., on Dec. 2, gave the press completely inaccurate information as he defended his participation in the Republican benefits cutoff.

"This is about people who have been collecting unemployment benefits for 99 weeks," he said, describing the bill he had just blocked.



The truth, completely different from how Sen. Barrasso described it, is as follows: President Obama and the Democrats are fighting for a 52-week reauthorization of two programs, Emergency Unemployment Compensation and Extended Benefits, which combined provide up to 73 weeks of benefits in some states.

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Those programs lapsed Nov. 30, meaning people laid off through no fault of their own are now only eligible for just 26 weeks of state-funded benefits. If the lapsed benefits are reauthorized, some jobless people will once again be eligible for up to 99 weeks of benefits - but not one day more than that.

The number of jobs created last month

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dropped significantly from October, when 151,000 jobs were added. Only 39,000 were added in November, well below the 150,000 the AFL-CIO says must be added each month just to keep up with growth in the labor force. To lower the nation's unemployment rate to 6 percent by 2013, says the Economic Policy Institute, the economy needs to add 350,000 jobs monthly.

Equally as ominous as the rising unemployment rate last month was the continuing crisis of long-term joblessness, with 6.3 million workers unemployed for six months or more. Overall, 44 percent of the officially unemployed have been out of work for 27 weeks or more.

The number of workers who are underemployed, which includes those who are too discouraged to look for work or who are working part-time out of dire necessity, remained at 17 percent in November. Overall last month, 27 million American workers who want work cannot find a job or full-time work. Beyond all of this, there are millions of first-time job seekers who never had a job.

Citing the loss of 13,000 manufacturing jobs,

Scott Paul, executive director of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, called the Dec. 3 jobless numbers "dreadful."

"What is infuriating is that this recession was unnecessary - it was caused by deregulation and indifference to speculation," said EPI President Lawrence Mishel. "Plus its depth and duration have been deepened by political forces resisting efforts to generate the millions more jobs we have needed. Unfortunately, there's much more pain ahead in the pipeline."

Actions initiated by the labor movement are taking place throughout December.

On a related note, the Senate rejected the Obama administration proposals to extend tax cuts to those making under \$250,000/year, and in a separate vote, to those making under \$1 million/year. This will set up the undesirable compromise to extend all tax cuts with the promise of extending jobless benefits for one year.



John Wojcik writes for the People's World.

Peace and the two Koreas

By PW Editorial Board

At the end of November, North Korea shelled South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island killing two South Korean military personnel and two civilians. The North Korean government says it opened fire in response to South Korean artillery practice.

There is no justification for the deaths. The loss of life is tragic and wrong. It's the first time North Korea's actions have resulted in civilian deaths since the war, a dangerous precedent.

Immediately after, the United States and South Korea conducted long-planned military exercises. Things seemed to quickly escalate putting the peace and stability to the whole region in danger.

The bloodcurdling rhetoric and saber-rattling on all sides was not helpful, either. For example, the head of the South Korean armed forces is quoted as swearing "a thousand fold revenge" for the people killed. North Korea issued a statement guaranteeing a "merciless counter-attack" that would "wipe out all enemies." The United States sent a nuclear powered aircraft carrier, USS

George Washington, into the Yellow Sea, which is also a form of saber rattling if there ever was one.

This saber-rattling may play well with respective domestic audiences, but it only served to escalate the conflict, and it always runs the danger of it getting out of hand.

Key to de-escalation is pressure for a negotiated settlement, in the context of the six-party talks (two Koreas, Japan, U.S., China, Russia) and any other format that shows a promise of defusing the crisis.

More intermediate and longer-term demands should include the demilitarization of the waters around the Korean Peninsula, the denuclearization of both Koreas, and normalization of relations between the two Koreas and between North Korea and the U.S. A formal end to the Korean War is needed to achieve these aims.

The sanctions regime against North Korea is wrong, and experience shows nothing good comes from such sanctions. Material assistance to North Koreans would do far more to defuse tensions than the present policy of sanctions.

The loss of life is tragic and wrong.

Government wage freeze — a bad idea

By Scott Marshall

President Obama announced his proposal recently for a two year wage freeze for all non-military government workers.

There are a number of reasons the proposal is a terrible idea, but two stand out in my mind. First, it is bad for the economy.

Even if it's a bargaining ploy for dealing with the Republican obstructionists (or should I say destructionists) it will cause real harm to the economy. Cutting spending on wages and on social programs is a prescription for economic disaster. It means less money in circulation, which means less demand, which means more layoffs and unemployment.

This idea feeds right into the notion that cuts and short-term deficit reduction will grow the economy. That sure isn't working too well in Europe.

It also highlights the incredible hypocrisy of the far right Republicans who want to cut benefits for millions of the unemployed, while claiming that tax cuts for the super rich will benefit the economy.

This while Big Business America is sitting on several trillion dollars, instead of investing in job creation and building the things the country needs - like green energy and green manufacturing, health care, infrastructure and education. All programs that would put millions back to work and save the economy.

The second reason that a federal wage freeze is dangerous: It feeds into racist, anti-worker stereotypes of the "lazy" public worker.

Yes, there are some federal workers who make really big salaries, but the stereotype of public workers ignores the reality — the vast major-



ity of federal employees make modest to meager wages. Custodial and hospital workers at the Veterans Administration that make in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range are more the norm.

More than that, federal workers provide important services that help people and keep the economy and our country going. Further the savings from a federal wage freeze wouldn't make even a tiny dent in the deficit.

Another troubling aspect of the proposed freeze is the question of whether it will violate existing union contracts. It's hard to imagine that it doesn't clash with scheduled pay raises and cost of living provisions. In which case, the proposal sets up a labor struggle between a pro-labor president and the unions. This would be a set back for the coalition that is needed to stop the Republican right-wing destruction machine.

This kind of disunity can hurt the progressive movement and make it easier for the far right to further shift the crisis on to the backs of the working class.

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No tax cuts for billionaires

By Tim Wheeler

No Tax Bailouts for Billionaires was the message of thousands of MoveOn.org members who joined street corner “speak outs” outside congressional district offices across the nation Dec. 2, including here in Port Angeles, Wash.

A crowd gathered in the chilled twilight at the office of Democrat Rep. Norm Dicks holding placards that read, “We need jobs, not tax gifts for the rich” and “I Need My Unemployment Check.”

Clallam County MoveOn.org Coordinator Bill Kildall warned against intense pressure on Democratic senators to cave in and extend tax cuts to the rich. He said MoveOn.org expects Washington State’s Democratic Senators Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray to reject compromise. “We expect them to represent our interests, the 98 percent of the people who put them in office, not the wealthy two percent.” He said the rich do not deserve or need a “\$700 billion tax giveaway.”

Rich Wingerter, a leader of the MoveOn.org Clallam County Council, debunked Republican claims that tax cuts for the rich will create jobs. “As we know from the experience of the last several years, tax cuts have not helped spur jobs,” he said. “Any extension based on that notion is pure fantasy.”

The income tax rate for millionaires and billionaires “should be at least 45 percent,” he concluded, noting that if the Bush-era tax cuts are terminated the top rate would return to the Clinton-era rate of only 39.5 percent.

La tecnología militar es una amenaza imperialista

Por Tribuna Popular

Así lo asegura el periodista Carlos Lozano, director del Semanario Voz, en entrevista exclusiva para Tribuna Popular al tiempo que señala que allí siguen las tropas estadounidenses con su armamento al servicio del gobierno de colombiano

Durante el encuentro el III Encuentro Civilización o Barbarie, recientemente realizado en la ciudad de Serpa, Portugal, el periodista Carlos Lozano, Director del Semanario Voz del Partido Comunista Colombiano, explicó que pese a que el convenio de cooperación militar entre Bogotá y Washington fue temporalmente frenado por decisión de la Corte Suprema de su país, “es muy temprano para decir si se va a mantener o no el peligro, pues allí están las tropas estadounidenses con la tecnología que ha puesto el imperialismo al servicio del gobierno de Colombia para actuar en el conflicto interno y sigue allí dispuesta para espiar a otros pueblos hermanos”.

“Naturalmente que un elemento nuevo, es que el actual mandatario Juan Manuel Santos, ha buscado la reconstrucción de las relaciones con Venezuela y Ecuador y con los miembros de UNASUR, organización donde Colombia estaba aislada. Esperamos que fluya ese proceso para que nuestra nación deje de ser puntal de EEUU para agredir a las revoluciones y los procesos de cambio que se están

dando en América Latina”, destacó Lozano.

“Aún no ha transcurrido tiempo suficiente para saber si Santos hará un viraje en la estrategia de geopolítica continental que ha puesto en marcha la Casa Blanca para intervenir en los asuntos internos de nuestros países y sobre todo para tratar de revertir las transformaciones progresistas en Latinoamérica y el Caribe”, enfatizó el dirigente comunista y además señaló que para su partido realmente no ha cambiado nada, pues no se ha producido una ruptura con la política de Seguridad Democrática de Uribe como herramienta de guerra y de confrontación.

Lozano destaca que la posición del PCC en este difícil escenario donde aumenta la violencia política hacia las organizaciones de izquierda, es “seguir participando en el proceso de construcción de la unidad y en todas las expresiones de la lucha popular en Colombia, en la resistencia de masas. Pensamos que lo más importante es buscar las salidas políticas de todos los conflictos, el armado, el social. Es necesario fortalecer la democracia para producir cambios en el terreno económico y saldar la deuda social que originó la pugna interna. El PCC sigue trabajando en medio de muchos riesgos y peligros, porque la política de terrorismo de Estado no ha desaparecido con el nuevo gobierno”.