

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## Filipinos lured into “slavery” in Louisiana

By John Wojcik

**T**heir story of enslavement and their escape started in the slums of Manila. Sleazy ‘recruiters’ scoured the streets and lured the workers here with assurances of plenty of money, a status job and U.S. citizenship, but when they got here they became indentured servants to a big profit-hungry corporation.

That description of how 17 workers who recently escaped modern-day slavery in Louisiana came to the U.S. in the first place, came today from the Rev. Primo Racimo, the priest-in-charge at St. Margaret of Scotland’s Episcopal Church on this city’s South Side.

The priest, activists and community groups from around the country and the labor movement are part of a growing coalition of protesters forming to fight for the rights of the Filipino workers brought to this country under false pretenses.

The scandal around Grand Isle Shipyard is particularly relevant, activists say, as the nation debates the big question of immigration reform.

The 17 who recently escaped were locked into cramped quarters, six to a room, in company dormitories surrounded by barbed wire fences. “When we got there the company took away our passports, trapping us. If anyone dared protest he was sent back to the Philippines immediately. Ma-



ligo and two other escapees, Adrian Fayagan and Joel Franco, have been going around the country telling their story to groups in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. On Feb. 12, they spoke to the Washington D.C. chapter of the Asian-Pacific American Labor Alliance, an AFL-CIO constituency group, seeking APALA and AFL-CIO backing for their struggle and the upcoming protests in New Orleans. Members of the Filipino community here in Chicago are planning to participate, and

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busloads of supporters will go to New Orleans this weekend from New York and Los Angeles.

Last November an explosion at the Black Elk facility in Louisiana, in which three Filipino workers were killed on a poorly-built oil platform, helped trigger a lawsuit by workers against Grand

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Isle. The lawsuit charged slavery, trafficking, discrimination, fraud and theft of millions of dollars in wages from Filipino workers who were forced to labor six to seven days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day with no overtime pay. They were paid only \$5.00 an hour and forced to work four months offshore with no rest. American workers have two weeks offshore and then return to shore for rest. Fifty other workers have joined the original 17 in the lawsuit.

The workers were charged \$1,000 to \$3,000 per month for a bunk bed in a 10 by 10 foot room in which six workers were forced to live. They were never allowed to leave the bunkhouses and were watched by camera.

They were prohibited from talking to American workers and they were not allowed to ride in the cars of American co-workers.

The only trip off the premises allowed was a one-hour per week escorted trip to a local Walmart.

Catholics were not allowed to attend mass even on Christmas Day.

The company took \$1,000 a month out of the

workers' paychecks for "taxes," but these taxes do not appear to have been paid by the company to the IRS or the State of Louisiana. "We ended up making only one dollar or two an hour," said Maligo.

This weekend the solidarity actions will involve visits by community, religious and labor leaders to the homes of victims in the New Orleans area. There will be public forums in which the workers themselves speak out and delegations will visit elected officials. Their will be a march on the shipyard too, winding its way through a New Orleans Filipino community founded in the eighteenth century. For information contact <http://nafconusa.org/contact>

APALA members in Washington learned last week that there is a rash of Filipino workers being brought into the U.S. for a variety of reasons. In addition to the Grand Isle workers sent out to slave away on Gulf oil platforms, workers are being brought in now to do shrimp harvesting on the Gulf Coast.



**John Wojcik is co-editor of Peoplesworld.org.**

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## Our infrastructure and climate change

By PW Editorial Board

**L**eaders of the labor-environmental group Blue-Green Alliance called on the president recently to launch and prioritize a national dialogue on climate change. In the wake of Superstorm Sandy, they also underscored a strong need to rebuild the nation's crumbling infrastructure. The groups outlined six steps for how strong improvements can be made:

1.) Reduce carbon pollution by regulating greenhouse gases emitted by power plants; We are calling for "intensive investment in preparing the country for climate change," said Kevin Knobloch, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists.

2.) Invest in clean energy manufacturing; "The country is ready for this," said Knobloch. "We have a skilled and ready work force, which we can use to ramp up energy efficiency and begin to lean on solar energy."

3.) Update schools/homes/businesses to save energy and reduce emissions; This, activists say, can become a matter of getting the word out; of getting people to recognize the imminence of the threat of climate change. It involves pushing clean

energy products, as well. "We need to manufacture clean energy products here in America," said USW president Leo Gerard. It is important to "put forward common-sense steps America can take to be ready for the changing climate."

4.) Rebuild our water systems: "Much infrastructure is still damaged in the wake of Sandy," said Michael Langford, president of the Utility Workers "We need to strengthen" our water systems. "This is something that's do-able, and we should prepare now, rather than lose enormous amounts of money by cleaning up the mess after the fact."

5.) Fix gas pipelines; "Across the country, pipelines are leaking pollution into our air and water," said the Blue-Green Alliance. "We can fix this by fixing existing pipelines and improving oversight and implementing strong safety regulations."

6.) Build a 21st century transportation system. As the country fights off the GOP inspired across the board budget cuts, these efforts deserve every support.

**As the country fights off the GOP inspired across the board budget cuts, these efforts deserve every support.**

# After three-year struggle, country club workers win big

By Marilyn Bechtel

**A**fter a nearly three-year struggle during which workers were illegally locked out for over two-and-a-half years, food service workers at Castlewood Country Club last week voted 44-1 to approve an excellent contract that provides job security, affordable family health coverage, raises and a substantial signing bonus.

“So many people told us that dishwashers and waitresses couldn’t win against millionaires,” said server Jeanette Cardenas. “But we’ve learned that it doesn’t matter who you are, if you stay strong and you’re on the side of justice.”

Under the new contract, workers will pay \$225 per month for family health care, the same amount the union proposed before the lockout began. Workers’ contribution will go down to \$150 per month in the contract’s final year.

“This isn’t just our victory,” said janitor Francisca Carranza. “So many people in the community, political leaders, pastors and other workers marched with us. Now we hope workers everywhere see this and understand that you don’t have to give up everything you’ve worked for. You can stand up for your family and win.”

Castlewood’s food service workers, members of UNITE HERE Local 2850, had enjoyed stable jobs with free family health care for many years. But in fall 2009, the country club sought to raise workers’ share of family health coverage costs to \$739 a month - over 40 percent of the average worker’s pay.

The workers countered by offering to pay \$225 per month for family health care. They wanted to continue negotiating, but Castlewood locked them out on Feb. 25, 2010.



pickets in front of Castlewood’s golf course and coordinated dozens of larger actions. They were joined by members of UNITE HERE and other unions, political leaders, local clergy and community members.

Several workers celebrated Mothers’ Day 2010 by going on a hunger strike.

The workers also organized a successful boycott of the country club and a high-profile civil disobedience action. Their story drew national attention.

On Aug. 17, 2012, an NLRB administrative judge found Castlewood’s lockout illegal, and said the club had bargained in bad faith and its proposals were motivated by hostility toward the union.

On Oct. 16, 2012, Castlewood ended the lockout, and 46 of the 61 locked-out workers returned to their jobs. Meanwhile, bargaining continued for a new contract.

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## Demonstrators tell Wall Street: Pay your taxes

By John Rummel

**W**e've been paying more taxes than Chase Bank; "how is that fair?" asked Karen Smith, a retiree from Detroit.

With winter winds whipping off the Detroit River, it was not a day for the feint of heart to be demonstrating but Smith was one of the determined souls outside Chase Bank in downtown Detroit. She was protesting Wall Street's misnamed "Fix the Debt" group that is pushing for cuts to critical benefits like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Smith said it's always on the small people, those that have nothing, to be forced to give up even more. "Who's taking care of who" she wondered. She said it's "really scary" living on a fixed income. Her monthly health co-pay just jumped from \$15 to \$75 a month. She said that doesn't seem like much to Chase but it's a "big bite" of her income.

The AFL-CIO, which helped organize more than 100 of yesterday's demonstration here and around the country, says corporate tax dodging costs us hundred of billions of dollars every year.

In Detroit it costs people even more. Wynn also noted that Chase Bank, one of the city's largest holders of mortgages, has made millions foreclosing on many of those homes causing a crisis in the city.

Ashley Forsberg, a registered nurse from Lansing was wearing a green "Robin Hood" hat to symbolize the need for a tax on Wall Street financial transactions. She said a small tax of just one-half of one percent would reap hundreds of billions of dollar a year.

## Trabajadores del acero expulsados de Rotek

Por Rick Nagin

**M**as que 120 miembros del United Steelworkers Local 8565 están haciendo piquetes todo el día contra Rotek, Inc., por la aplicación unilateral de la empresa de rodamientos de rodillos, del contrato de recorte de salarios de entre un 20 y un 30 por ciento, así como fuertes reducciones de las vacaciones, pago de horas extras y el seguro de salud. La compañía lo llama una huelga, pero el sindicato lo llama una "expulsión", que apunta a la acción de una empresa de seguridad rompeshuelgas que bloqueaba la entrada a la planta para el turno de medianoche 18 de enero y la imposición arbitraria de todos los ámbitos de recortes sin precedentes.

Rotek dijo que la acción de los guardias de seguridad AFIMAC se debió a "problemas de comunicación".

"En mis 27 años de negociación nunca he visto nada como esto", dijo el Representante Personal del USW, Dennis Brubaker. "Incluso cuando LTV estaba en bancarrota en 1986 sólo querían un recorte de \$ 3,50 en los salarios y beneficios combinados. Rotek impuso un recorte de \$ 6 la hora sólo en los salarios. Esto resulta en alrededor de \$ 10.000 al año por cada trabajador". "El mediador quería saber por qué estos recortes eran necesarios", dijo el Vicepresidente del sindicato, Marcus Graves, un operador de control numérico de la máquina en la línea de piquete, "pero la empresa no va a abrir sus libros."

"No es justo. Eso no está bien", dijo Bill, un maquinista. "Es la clásica avaricia corporativa sacándolo de las espaldas de los trabajadores".

Los piqueteros culparon de las acciones de Rotek a Timoteo Gudszend, el nuevo presidente de la compañía, un recién graduado en ingeniería mecánica en Stuttgart, Alemania.

"Todo esto comenzó cuando el Dr. Tim entró," dijo Bill.

"Ni siquiera negociaron hasta justo antes de que el contrato expirara el 1 de noviembre", dijo Brubaker. "Así que, terminada la extensión de su contrato en diciembre y aplicaron el recorte de salario el 14 de enero."

"Debemos conocer la próxima semana si vamos a recibir beneficios de desempleo", dijo Brubaker. "El mediador ha fijado una nueva sesión de negociaciones para el 19 de febrero. Queremos tener algunas conversaciones significativas".

Rotek ha intentado con poco éxito reclutar esquirols (rompe huelgas). Los 60 miembros sindicales despedidos el año pasado se han negado a los intentos de Rotek de cruzar la línea de piquete y sólo un puñado de rompeshuelgas, presuntamente contratados por AFIMAC, están enviando pedidos anteriores y haciendo el mantenimiento.

"Aquí no hay producción", dijo Bill, quien agregó que algunos pedidos pueden haber sido trasladados a la planta más pequeña no sindicalizada de la compañía en Florence, Kentucky.

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