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Time is now for immigration reform

By John Wojcik

The executive council of the AFL-CIO unanimously passed a resolution here Feb. 27 demanding that the Congress of the United States immediately pass immigration reform.

“In November, American voters soundly rejected the pro-corporate and anti-immigrant agenda advanced by those who have stood in the way of comprehensive immigration reform,” the resolution said. “President Obama enters his second term with a mandate to fight for and pass immigration reform. Members of our unions, like the rest of the American public, strongly support reform that includes a road map to citizenship for aspiring Americans who love this country and call it home.”

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, has been one of the most consistent voices in the trade union movement calling for immigration reform. She discussed her opinions on the issue during a break in the executive council session yesterday.

“No matter how you look at this, it just makes sense,” she said. “First, the current immigration system adversely affects both native and foreign born workers in the United States.

“Whether its the realization that a nation made great by immigrants has a moral imperative



to live up to our American values of democracy and opportunity, or because it's sound economic policy, or because it's just the right thing to do for hardworking families, reforming our immigration system makes sense.”

Weingarten argued strongly for laws that protect immigrant workers in the United States. “When immigrant workers are paid below the market rates, it drives down wages for all workers with similar skills,” she said. “The best way to

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protect the jobs and wages of all workers is to apply strong labor standards equally. A worker's immigration status should be irrelevant.”

She described how her union, three years ago, brought to light and helped end threats, extortion and other abuses of 350 Filipino teachers recruit-

Non-traditional labor organizations are also mobilizing for immigration law reform.

ed to work in post-Katrina Louisiana.

“The AFT helped these teachers win a \$4.5 million settlement against the unscrupulous recruitment agency. I shudder to think what would have happened to them without their union.”

“Comprehensive immigration reform is a top priority for America’s unions,” said AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka in a sit-down with reporters at the executive council meeting yesterday.

“We’ve built a mobilization structure and we’re out in force like we were in the presidential election and the health care fight,” he added, “with one message - immigration reform now.”

Maria Elena Durazo, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor executive secretary-treasurer, said the AFL-CIO is going to hold major “launch events” over the next few weeks to “get the word out in every part of the country whether that be Miami, Chicago, or Seattle.”

“Let no one doubt this,” she said. “I remind everyone about what unions did to pass health care reform and about what we did to first elect and then re-elect President Obama. Well that’s what we will do to get this done.” She said that the

campaign for immigration reform will be “a major reflection of how we have transformed from an election to election mode to a year-round continuing campaign operation.”

Trumka assured reporters who wanted to know whether there was any dissent among unions on immigration reform that “American’s unions are all in on this.” Only National ICE Council 118, an AFL-CIO affiliate which represents federal immigration agents, has called for expanded authority for its members to arrest and deport undocumented immigrants.

Non-traditional labor organizations which are representing undocumented workers and are affiliated with the AFL-CIO are also mobilizing for immigration law reform.

These include the National Domestic Worker Alliance, the National Day Labor Organizing Network and the National Guestworker Alliance. These groups organized demonstrations in Washington on the day of the State of the Union message.



John Wojcik co-edits Peoplesworld.org.

The vision of Rosa Parks

By PW Editorial Board

Rosa Parks’ vision for freedom and peace continues to inspire our nation and the ongoing movement for social justice in the 100th year of her birth. The struggles to protect and expand the Voting Rights Act and for immigrant rights draw upon her legacy.

The Rosa Parks postage stamp and national statue remind us of the power of Rosa Parks and the movement she courageously dedicated her life to.

Rosa Parks grew up in Alabama and witnessed the racist terror of the Ku Klux Klan first hand. She said that the first time she met a white person who treated her with respect was at the Highlander School in Tennessee where she attended a workshop on labor rights and met the Rev. Martin Luther King and Pete Seeger.

Rosa Parks was trained as a teacher but due to racism worked as a seamstress. She understood, from her own life experience, the need for workers to organize to achieve a better life. She

also understood the need for unity.

Her act of civil disobedience on December 1, 1955, refusing to give her bus seat to a white passenger, sparked the Montgomery bus boycott and expanded the scope and size of the entire civil rights movement.

The struggles that Rosa Parks embodies are far from over. Days after the national statue was unveiled, Supreme Court Justice Scalia stunned the world by labeling measures in the Voting Rights Act as “racial entitlements.” In so doing, he dismissed the contributions of Rosa Parks and millions of others who tirelessly marched and sat in and picketed and sacrificed to secure the basic right to vote.

The struggles of Rosa Parks go on as well in the growing movement, embraced by labor, to win an end to deportations and a path to citizenship and voting rights for the millions of immigrant workers without documents in our country today.

Rosa Parks was a warm person who cared about her community. Her spirit lives on.

The struggles of Rosa Parks go on to win an end to deportations and a path to citizenship and voting rights.

Detroit needs jobs, not emergency managers

By John Rummel

Republican Governor Rick Snyder's decision today to appoint an emergency manager for Detroit is a serious blow to equality, fairness, and democratic governance.

Emergency managers have failed to solve financial crises in Pontiac, Benton Harbor and other Michigan cities because they do not deal with the overwhelming cause of the problem: growing poverty and joblessness.

The City Council is considering challenging the move in court.

Alarmed the Governor would make such a decision, the NAACP issued a statement this past Tuesday at a press conference inside the organization's headquarters.

"Democracy should not be taken from the city of Detroit, or any other city in the state of Michigan, simply on the basis of economic distress," said NAACP President Rev. Wendell Anthony.

The threat of an emergency manager grew after a state review team concluded the city has a financial crisis.

However Anthony said there is no way an emergency manager is going to come into the city and fix in 18 months "what has taken 50 to 100 years to develop."

Over the span of many decades, Detroit's economy became auto dependent as automotive companies made the city the center of the industry. Globalization and outsourcing of jobs has eliminated hundreds of thousands of those jobs. In addition, this largely African American city faced racial and economic segregation, a "redline," that Anthony said cuts the city off from surrounding



public workers have already been subjected to deep pay cuts and huge increases in their health care costs.

Anthony noted that Detroit is not the only community under financial distress. Recent news reports have documented communities in Oakland County, one of the wealthiest counties in the state, being forced to layoff police and fire personnel and cut back other services. Bad as the cuts are, the higher incomes of many residents in those communities make it easier to survive.

Many residents in Detroit have few resources to fall back on. There are now whole areas of the city where the median family income is less than \$16,000. More cuts in income and jobs are unfathomable.

"We don't need an emergency manager; we need someone to help manage our emergency," Anthony said. He cautioned against looking for "easy" and "half-baked" solutions and called on the state to instead do serious thinking on how to solve the economic problems the city faces.

Democracy should not be taken from the city of Detroit, simply on the basis of economic distress.

Oakland celebration honors community leaders

By Marilyn Bechtel

It was a night to celebrate, to recount history, to look to struggles yet to come.

Above all, it was a night to appreciate the contributions and achievements of members of the African American community - from 97-year-old Mother Lahella Charles to the youthful singing groups, the Martinez sisters and the Ware-Carter trio.

"This is Black History Month and I just want to tell you kids, make sure you guys dream!" Samantha Allen Wise told the many young people in the crowd that packed the Niebyl-Proctor Library. "Parents: allow your children to dream," she said, "because if they have a dream they're going to move forward toward that dream!"

Wise, one of the event's awardees, heads the Community Empowerment Organization.

Carole Ward Allen, professor of African American history and former Bay Area Rapid Transit board member, turned the tables on the event's lead organizer, retired teacher Cassandra Lopez - affectionately known as Mama Cassie - as she observed, "It's always interesting how people honor other people, but they need to be honored. It's her night if it's anyone's," Allen said.

Lopez, in turn, urged the crowd to celebrate "the achievements, the good things that happen," but at the same time to take on "the things that challenge our souls and our hearts," including the homicides wracking the city of Oakland.

El pueblo ha hablado: Salven nuestras escuelas!

Por Lucy Parsons

Cientos de estudiantes, maestros, padres, trabajadores y aliados llenaron el edificio del parque Fuller de Chicago el jueves por la noche para informar a representantes de Las Escuelas Públicas de Chicago (CPS) que no aceptarán el cierre de nueve escuelas públicas en los vecindarios obreros y diversos alrededor de Bridgeport, Kenwood y Back of the Yards.

La reunión fue llena de la solidaridad: padres luchando por contener las lágrimas mientras describieron escuelas que se han convertido en centros críticos de sus comunidades; estudiantes suplicando a CPS a que les deja estos lugares donde se sienten seguros, respetados y estimulados; maestros relatando historias de estudiantes con necesidades especiales quienes, en sus aulas, dijeron sus primeras palabras, leyeron sus primeros libros o escribieron sus nombres por primera vez.

Toma, por ejemplo, la Primaria George B. McClellan, una escuela en Bridgeport. El CPS tiene pensado cerrar McClellan, llamándola "subutilizada".

Estudiante Kamyra Parks, de ocho años de edad, tomó un momento de su tiempo para dar una entrevista al Mundo Popular. ¿Su opinión? "Mi escuela es perfecta".

La madre de Kamyra, Robyn Parks, dice que estaba sorprendida cuando recibió las noticias que el CPS quería cerrar McClellan.

Sra. Parks, como otros defensores de las escuelas públicas, habla de McClellan como una institución vibrante que ha movilizó masivamente el apoyo de los padres y la comunidad por los estudiantes, el 25%

de los cuales requieren atenciones especiales.

Ivette Gaston, una representante de la comunidad en el Concilio Local de Escuelas (LSC) y madre de 3 estudiantes en la lista de honor rechazó las alegaciones del CPS: "Cuando dicen subutilizados, no entendemos, porque ya estamos convirtiendo espacios de almacenaje en espacios para estudiantes con necesidades especiales".

Bozena Brogan, la madre de un estudiante con autismo de McClellan, fue a su LSC para pedir un "cuarto sensorial", un espacio con los recursos para ayudar a estudiantes con autismo a sobrellevar las dificultades que suben en las aulas de clase.

Juntas, Gaston y Brogan lo hicieron realidad, fregando pisos y pintando murales para transformar un espacio de almacenaje en un ambiente calmante con luces suaves, colchones, trampolines, y juegos. Otro espacio de almacenaje se convirtió en un cuarto de foniatría; el sótano se convirtieron en sala de arte y danza donde miembros del Ballet Joffrey les enseñan a los estudiantes el arte del movimiento.

Para la hija de Bozena Brogan, estos iniciativas han sido profundamente importantes. Por primera vez, dice Brogan, su hija habla de tener amigos.

Esta lucha solo está empezando, y un oficial en uniforme de la policía de Chicago trabajando en seguridad para el evento resumió el espíritu de lucha que el pueblo de Chicago trae a la defensa de la educación pública: "Acabatelos".

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