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Obama's Social Security cuts draw protests

By John Wojcik

President Obama is expected to propose benefit cuts in a formal budget proposal that would base future cost-of-living hikes for Social Security recipients on the “chained CPI,” instead of the Consumer Price Index. Labor and its allies in a broad array of movements are rising up against the plan.

“Chained CPI is a Social Security cut plain and simple,” said AFL-CIO Director of Policy Damon Silvers. “One of the key things that makes Social Security a real provider of economic security is that it has a Cost of Living Adjustment that protects the value of benefits as time passes. Chained CPI is a Washington trick.”

Roger Hickey of the Campaign for America's Future said that “if Obama pushes the chained CPI as part of a proposed ‘grand bargain’ with the GOP to reduce future federal budget deficits he’ll alienate key parts of his coalition, break faith with the voters and shatter the Democratic Party.”

The CAF has been inundating the White House all week with e-mails opposing the chained CPI and any cuts to Medicare and Medicaid.

Fifty five percent of voters oppose the “chained” CPI. A recent poll, Strengthening Social Security: What Do Americans Want?, from the National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI), highlights a large majority, 64 percent, thought



the COLA should be increased to better protect seniors and other beneficiaries from inflation and rising prices of food, utilities and other necessities.

Obama is expected, on Wednesday, to send a budget plan to Capitol Hill that is different from the usual statements of principle regarding the budget that Republicans have rejected out of hand.

The idea is to get the Republicans to agree to

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new taxes on the wealthy and on corporations in exchange for the Social Security cuts.

“Let us not balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable,” said independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders.

The budget should not be balanced on the backs of the most vulnerable.

“What the chained CPI would do to seniors on Social Security is bad,” Sanders said. “Many of them are living on \$13,000, \$14,000 or \$15,000 a year on Social Security benefits. The chained CPI would say to them, if you are 65 today, by the time you are 75, your benefits would be cut by some \$650 a year. By the time you are 85, your benefits would be cut by \$1,000 a year.

“What this whole debate is about is how do we go forward with deficit reduction in a way which is fair, a way which is moral, and a way which calls for good economic policy. I would argue when some of the largest corporations in America pay zero in federal income taxes, before we cut Social Security and benefits for disabled veterans, we ask those people to start paying their fair share of taxes.”

“This must be stopped,” Hickey warned. The “grand bargain” Obama proposes to reach with the GOP on deficits “would bargain away the pillars of the New Deal.” Hickey calls the grand bargain “a grand swindle.”

The proposal on budget deficit reduction coming from President Obama is supposed to re-

place the indiscriminate sequester cuts that went into effect several weeks ago. The administration has said that it would back things like the chained CPI and other cuts, however, only if Republicans agree to significant additional taxes on the rich.

The other spending reductions included in the ‘compromise’ Obama budget include \$400 billion from health programs and \$200 billion from farm subsidies, federal employee retirement programs and unemployment compensation. In Medicare, savings would come largely from payments to health care providers and pharmaceutical companies and by having higher income beneficiaries pay more for coverage, but also from what would amount to cuts in benefits, critics point out.

Advocates for Medicare point out that even with the sequester cuts, which were supposed to shield Medicare, there are reports now that Medicare patients are not getting needed chemotherapy treatments at clinics which themselves have been forced to make cuts due to the sequester.



John Wojcik is co-editor of Peoplesworld.org.

Job growth slows down

By PW Editorial Board

The latest jobs report issued by the government shows the economy added just 88,000 new jobs in March while the official jobless rate dropped a tad to 7.6 percent from February’s 7.7 percent.

The biggest reason for the tiny drop in the unemployment rate was that 500,000 people dropped out of the workforce altogether last month - meaning they are feeling too defeated and too disgusted to even bother looking for a job.

“The only way to achieve a sustainable recovery and rebuild a robust economy benefitting all is to address the ongoing crisis of long-term unemployment,” said Christine Owens of the National Employment Law Project. “To do that, our leaders need to invest in meaningful job creation programs instead of wasting time with partisan infighting or, worse yet, doing damage with misguided austerity policies and huge budget cuts.”

While the 88,000 jobs created means we have seen 36 straight months of positive job growth, during the previous 12 months that growth was

more than double what it was last month. It had been averaging 169,000 per month. It takes 150,000 new jobs a month just to keep up with the rate of population growth,

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said that he was particularly upset because the bad news on the jobs front comes just as the president is planning to unveil a budget that cuts Social Security and Medicare benefits for working families

“This is a sign of the wrong headed policy driving our slow recovery,” Trumka said. “Millions of Americans remain out of work and the job market is especially devastating for young people. “We continue to reject chained CPI as more ‘Washington speak’ that disguises awful ideas that harm working families,” Trumka said.

“The president should drop these misguided cuts and focus instead on building support in Congress for investing in jobs.”

Trumka is right. The time is now to fight for public works jobs.

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Food workers walk out for union recognition

By Mark Gruenberg

Fed up with wages so low that they often face eviction, and lack of power to fight for a decent living standard, thousands of New York City fast food workers staged a second one-day walkout from their jobs, on April 4. The workers led by Fast Food Forward, a community-based organizing group, demanded living wages of \$15 an hour - barely enough to survive on in New York - and the right to organize without employer interference. It was their second walkout. The first was in November.

The Service Employees gives financial and logistical backing to Fast Food Forward. The group also sent out a nationwide e-mail asking for signers on a petition demanding the higher wages and union recognition.

There are 50,000 fast food workers at McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, Domino's, Pizza Hut and similar eateries in New York. Most are immigrants, members of minority groups, or both. The average New York fast food worker earns \$8.25 hourly.

"Right now, the overwhelming majority of workers are paid the minimum wage or close to the minimum wage," said Fast Food Forward campaign director Jonathan Westin. "There is no way they can afford rent, can afford many times to put food on the table or even afford the burgers they're making."

"Today we're taking a stand - along with hundreds of other fast food workers - for a bet-



without intimidation. By standing together for our families and our communities, we can lift the entire economy and rebuild America's middle class.

"Fast food workers are living in poverty without enough to meet our basic needs. Many of us rely on food stamps and some of us live in homeless shelters. Meanwhile, the \$200 billion fast food industry continues to profit from our work without returning those profits to our communities and New York City's economy.

"But worst of all, they think we can be ignored. Help us show that we're not just 'cheap labor,' but men and women who want nothing more than to be treated with dignity and let to earn an honest living."

The workers deliberately chose April 4 as their walkout day to invoke the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The civil rights leader was assassinated 45 years ago that day, in Memphis, Tenn., as he led sanitation workers there in their campaign for a living wage and the right to organize with AFSCME. Those workers eventually won.

There are 50,000 fast food workers at McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, Domino's, Pizza Hut and similar eateries in New York.

Hyatt hit for union-busting

By Henry Millstein

Cries of “No justice, no peace” and “Escucha, escucha, estamos en la lucha!” rang out across the front entrance of the Hyatt Santa Clara April 4 as around 200 workers and community members rallied to protest the Hyatt Corporation’s union busting and other abuse of workers. The rally was one of a series of actions at Hyatt hotels throughout the San Francisco Bay area.

Recently, union supporter Felipe Parga was fired on trumped-up charges of violating company policy. Maritza Wong, who has worked as a banquet server at the Hyatt for six years, told this reporter that managers often follow union supporters around as they do their work. Since coming out in support of the union, she said, the hours of work she gets have been sharply curtailed. Her husband, Daniel, a banquet server for 12 years, has also been harrassed.

Maritza Wong spoke out in front of the entire rally in support of the union’s “Someone Like Me” campaign. It is a full fledged effort to put a worker representative on Hyatt’s board of directors: “Someone like me needs to be on the Board of Directors, so someone like me can speak out” for workers’ concerns.

The rally drew an impressive number of community supporters. Fr. Bill Leininger, a retired Roman Catholic priest, and the Rev. John Fresemann, a Lutheran pastor, joined the action as members of the local Interfaith Committee for Economic Justice.

La Revolución Cubana comenzó en 1959

Por Esteban Morales

Bajo un título carente de rigor histórico y objetividad, Roberto Zurbano trata de caracterizar la situación de los negros en la Cuba de hoy. Como evaluador crítico del tema que soy, podemos compartir algunas de sus aseveraciones, pero no en términos tan absolutos y mucho menos, con la carencia de objetividad con que estas se formulan. Tampoco las conclusiones a que el Autor arriba.

Afirmar que “para los negros cubanos la revolución no ha comenzado”, no se sostiene, ni aun dentro de la compleja realidad cubana de hoy.

Por tanto, cualquier explicación de lo que hoy tiene lugar en Cuba con los negros, pasa necesariamente por la comprensión más profunda de esos periodos de dependencia y de que en la Isla la pobreza fue también masivamente blanca, aunque la riqueza nunca fue negra. Algo que arrastramos durante varios siglos, hasta llegar al triunfo revolucionario de 1959.

La población pobre cubana fue beneficiada a partir de una política social, extraordinariamente humanitaria, que combatió y aun combate la pobreza y la desigualdad hasta el mismo borde del igualitarismo.

Dentro de la realidad social generada por esa política, negros y mestizos fueron sumamente beneficiados también. De modo que si hoy contamos con una masa importante de

médicos, científicos, intelectuales y obreros calificados negros, se lo debemos a esa política social, que marcó profundamente a la sociedad cubana, durante sus más de 30 años de existencia posteriores a 1959.

No hay que negar que se cometieron errores; uno de ellos, tal vez el más importante, fue no considerar el “color de la piel”, como una variable de diferenciación social. El no considerar que por razones de sus diferentes puntos de partida histórico, el negro, además de ser más pobre, había sufrido por su condición de esclavo primero y de negro después, las desventajas que implicaba haber tenido que soportar el racismo y la discriminación racial, que le situaban siempre en una posición de desventaja ante la población blanca, aunque estos últimos también fueran pobres. Nuestra sociedad no había sido diseñada para que blancos y negros y mestizos fueran iguales.

Ningún gobierno anterior a 1959 hizo nada por los pobres en general, ni por los negros en particular. Más bien los gobiernos precedentes, gobernaron el país para el beneficio de unos pocos, con todos los mecanismos e instrumentos de una administración neocolonial, que mantuvo el racismo y la discriminación racial, la corrupción y la pobreza, desplegando el modelo de explotación y control, que Estados Unidos había diseñado para la Isla.