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Labor leaders hail Obama speech, call for more action on jobs

By John Wojcik

The nation's union leaders, while endorsing the president's April 15 speech on the budget deficit, say job creation is among several major things that will need to be addressed if the long-term fiscal health of the nation is to be restored.

The Obama plan would cut \$4 trillion in projected deficits over the next 12 years, less than the \$6 trillion proposal by House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka dubbed the Ryan plan a "fraud."

A major difference between the two plans is that the Republicans want to permanently extend the Bush tax cuts for the rich at a cost of \$4trillion over the next decade, something Obama vowed never to allow.

Trumka gave his strongest praise to the president's promises to end those tax cuts, to protect Social Security and to veto any plan that turns Medicare into a voucher program or Medicaid into block grants under the control of the states.

"President Obama gave a promise to working people that he wouldn't allow us to go down the path set out by the radical Republican right," said Trumka, "a path that leads to more lost jobs and a decline in our national standards."

The president of the nation's largest labor federation also said "the president understands why Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid

are so important. We oppose cuts to any of these critical programs, no matter who proposes them."

Trumka said, however, that only massive job creation can solve the budget deficit over the long haul. "Let us refocus our national energy on job creation - because successful job creation is the key to making long-term deficit reduction both easier and more politically achievable.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said in a phone interview that she thought the president's speech was im-



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portant "because it steered the debate away from an assault on the middle class and the poor, and toward shared responsibility." She said her reading of the speech was that it was calling for "critical investments to strengthen our nation."

Leaders of some unions expressed concern about Obama's decision to push ahead with the current version of the U.S. - Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

None of this is to say that union leaders don't have their differences with the administration. Some of those surfaced at an AFL-CIO executive council meeting earlier this week and others in phone interviews on April 14 and 15. Although unions see the president as an ally, they are not necessarily always happy with everything the administration does.

The Firefighters expressed at the labor meeting this week that they thought they had won a victory recently by convincing even Republicans in the House to support funding for additional firefighter training and hiring. They feel the president and Democratic leaders gave that win away in last minute bargaining over a budget deal to keep the government running.

Leaders of some unions expressed concern about the administration's decision to push ahead with the current version of the U.S. - Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Although the current version commits Colombia to pursuing the murderers of 2,900 union activists over the last 25 years, it includes no timetable or mechanism for doing so. American unions want those provisions.

The Machinists expressed concerns that the

Administration should be doing more for the unemployed. They are also unhappy about a Department of Defense announcement this week that it is cutting back on its Joint Strike Fighter program, a program that provides machinist union jobs in Connecticut, Florida and Texas.

The National Nurses Union warned that it would campaign against any lawmaker, Democrats included, who votes to cut Social Security in any way.

Larry Cohen, president of the Communications Workers of America, pointed out, however, "More than 90 percent of the discussion at our meetings was not about problems with the president or the Democrats but about making a unified fight against the Ryan budget." Cohen singled out the Republican plans to destroy or gut Medicare, slash education aid and slash job training. "The other 10 percent of the discussion," Cohen said, "was really not about opposition to the president but about labor's approach to how Democrats and progressives should organize to fight what the Republicans want to do."



John Wojcik writes for the People's World.

150 years later, a new battle over labor

By PW Editorial Board

On April 12, we marked the 150th anniversary of the official start of the Civil War with the firing on Fort Sumter.

And so began the war to end slavery in the United States of America, and to keep the promise declared in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

One hundred fifty years later our country has the proud distinction of having elected its first African American president in a clear and unmistakable indication of how far this nation has come since the days when men, women and children were sold as chattel on the "free market."

For anyone with lingering doubts, President Obama's victories in North Carolina and Virginia, the home state of Jefferson Davis and the capital of the Confederacy, were firm indications that the South and indeed the country has changed perhaps forever.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the forc-

es of ruling-class racism, however, did not take these victories lying down, and with a scarcely concealed "rebel yell" organized a hate-filled Republican/tea party revolt to undo this great victory for democracy.

Having won a partial victory by re-taking control of the U.S. House of Representatives, they have now unleashed a many-sided assault on labor, women, and all minorities, with a particularly sharp edge directed at African Americans, the likes of which has not been seen in decades. A refined racism has been a central element of this campaign.

Yet just a few weeks later came the news that Glenn Beck's vitriol will soon be off the air at Fox News. Change is still alive and well in America.

A new moment is beginning in U.S. politics. It is ironic that on the 150th anniversary of a bloody battle over the form of labor, a new battle over labor, civil and human rights has begun. The stakes are no less high. Only unity and massive democratic struggle will guarantee that the cost to the nation will not be as great.

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Banks agree to compensate foreclosure victims

By Joe Sims

Over a dozen banks will compensate victims for losses that occurred as a result of mistakes on foreclosures according to an agreement reached with government regulators today. The banks are accused of improperly processing mortgages causing homeowners to lose homes and money.

Over the past two years, banks and mortgages companies across the country engaged in the practice of “robo-signing,” in which thousands of foreclosure documents were signed off without careful review of their accuracy.

Millions of homes have been seized since the beginning of the sub-prime foreclosure crisis.

Last year, after mass protests led by labor and community several banks agreed to temporarily halt foreclosure, rejecting increasing demands for moratorium on evictions. The banks include Wells Fargo, J.P. Morgan Chase and others. J.P. Morgan Chase may hire 3000 new employees to handle the consent decree according to news reports.

Important details, including whether the principal on mortgages will be lowered have not yet been worked out. Many mortgages are now “underwater” with homeowners owing more than than the property is worth.

Attorneys General in all 50 states last year pursued an investigation of banks hoping to reach agreement with them to compensate consumers.

Some contend the agreements move in the wrong direction. Representative Maxine Waters, a California Democrat and member of the Financial Services Committee, called the orders “disappointing.” Water continued “I fear that these consent orders are merely an attempt to do an end-run around our state attorneys general.” says Bloomberg.com.

In related news, a Senate panel faulted Gold-



man Sachs and Deutsche Bank for practices that precipitated the financial crisis. Banks deliberately misled buyers of stock and securities as to their value while betting on their failure. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mi., chairman of the panel that investigated the causes of the financial crisis said, “Why would Goldman deny what is so obvious, that they were engaged in a huge short in the year 2007? Why would they deny it? Because they gained at the expense of their clients, and they used abusive practices to do it.”

Few if any criminal proceeding for bank fraud have occurred since the start of the crisis. The New York Times writes, “several years after the financial crisis, which was caused in large part by reckless lending and excessive risk taking by major financial institutions, no senior executives have been charged or imprisoned, and a collective government effort has not emerged. This stands in stark contrast to the failure of many savings and loan institutions in the late 1980s.”

The “stability” of the financial system is used as an excuse, with regulators, saying they did as best as they could under the circumstances.

Sen. Levin has referred his findings to the Justice Department for possible prosecution.

Millions of homes have been seized since the beginning of the sub-prime foreclosure crisis.

Thousands at Michigan Capitol: "We are the people"

By John Rummel

Thousands of workers from across the state rallied here today with a message for the Republican-controlled legislature: "We are the people - protect us, not the CEOs."

A woman wearing a black Grim Reaper costume, complete with mask and long scythe, stood on the front lawn of the Capitol this morning as the crowd gathered. Behind her were tombstones labeled "Here lies workers' rights" and "Here lies the middle class."

She spoke about family members who are unemployed, and her 83-year-old father, who will all suffer under Gov. Rick Snyder's budget now being debated by the lawmakers inside the Capitol. "We need to recall Rick."

Around her, thousands expressed the wide anger among Michigan workers over Snyder's budget and a barrage of anti-worker measures now before the legislature.

The governor's budget gives a \$1.8 billion tax cut to big corporations and pays for it by cutting revenue sharing to cities, slicing hundreds of millions of dollars from education, and raising taxes on working class families and retirees.

The right is seeking to undermine unions and wage standards through a "right to work" measure and by not requiring state contractors to pay prevailing wage.

A key bill would allow the governor to appoint dictator-like "emergency financial managers" to run as many as 150 Michigan cities or school systems that are in financial distress. Another bill would introduce Arizona-style racial profiling in law enforcement; another would ban unions from using public libraries for organizing.

It was the largest rally so far since Snyder announced his budget.

El Congreso VI del Partido Comunista de Cuba

Por Prensa Latina

El líder de la Revolución cubana, Fidel Castro, asiste hoy a la clausura del VI Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba.

Durante el encuentro, iniciado el pasado 16 de abril en el Palacio de Convenciones, los delegados discutieron y aprobaron el Informe Central al evento, presentado por Raúl Castro en la inauguración.

En cinco comisiones y plenaria se debatió el Proyecto de Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revolución, que recibió el visto bueno luego de nuevos intercambios y la amplia consulta popular.

También, el VI Congreso orientó al Gobierno la creación de una Comisión Permanente para la Implementación y Desarrollo de dichos lineamientos, sin menoscabo de las funciones de los organismos de la Administración Central del Estado.

Los delegados consideraron que el Informe Central resulta esencial para emprender las tareas futuras, fundamentalmente en la economía, y constituye una valoración objetiva del crucial momento que vive la nación.

Paralelamente no se descuidarán un instante los pilares que garantizan la soberanía e independencia de Cuba: la unidad del pueblo y su permanente disposición a defender a cualquier precio el socialismo.

El VI Congreso encargó además al Comité Central trasladar recomendaciones al Parlamento para perfeccionar los órganos del Poder Popular, el sistema electoral y la división política administrativa.

El Primer Secretario del Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC), Raúl Castro, señaló hoy que la misión prin-

cipal del ocupante de ese puesto es defender, preservar y proseguir perfeccionando el socialismo.

Al clausurar el VI Congreso de la organización, que aconteció aquí desde el pasado 16 de abril, el también presidente cubano recalcó que asume su última tarea con la firme convicción y compromiso de no permitir jamás el regreso del régimen capitalista.

Tengo sobradas razones para proclamar que las FAR, enfatizó Raúl Castro, nunca renunciarán a cumplir el papel al servicio de la defensa del pueblo, el Partido, la Revolución y el socialismo.

Manifestó que la condición de miembro del Comité Central, si bien en parte había sido hasta ahora un reconocimiento a la trayectoria de lucha de los elegidos, a partir de este momento deberá predominar el concepto de que esa categoría representa una enorme responsabilidad ante el PCC y el pueblo.

Nos proponemos utilizar activamente al Comité Central en la materialización de los acuerdos del congreso, como foro para analizar de modo colegiado, sin asomo de formalismo, los principales temas de la vida del PCC y la nación, significó.

Lo mismo haremos, agregó, en el Buró Político, como le compete, por ser el organismo superior de dirección entre los plenos del Comité Central.

Dijo las tres nuevas promociones a miembros del buró, las cuales, añadió, no son casuales pues obedecen a la prioridad que concede la organización a su labor en la capital y a la significación estratégica de la actualización del modelo económico y el desarrollo de la economía nacional.

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