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It's not just Wisconsin: A nationwide counteroffensive is emerging

By Sam Webb

This is a moment of heightened class and democratic struggle. The signs are everywhere - not least in states in the nation's heartland. It isn't a time for the fainthearted.

The Republican right is squeezing labor and other sectors of the people's movement at the federal, state and local level. Nothing like it has occurred in the post-World-War-II period. And we haven't seen the worst of it.

Public workers are at the center of this attack to be sure, but it also reaches beyond them to the entire working class and people.

While right-wing Republicans are doing the dirty work, not far behind, pulling the strings where necessary, are major sections of the capitalist class, with a two-fold aim.

One aim is to shift the costs of the current crisis of capitalism onto the American people, who had no hand in its making. This is what the capitalists always do in the midst of any economic crisis no matter if it is deep or shallow.

The other aim - and this is what makes this crisis response from the top layers of capital different - is to strategically undermine labor's power in the political arena, much like it has done to labor in the field of collective bargaining.

If successful, it would leave the organized



section of the working class, the main social force combating right-wing extremism, a badly weakened actor in U.S. politics and society.

But as Robert Burns said about "the best laid schemes o' mice an' men," they go oft astray. Neither labor nor its allies is rolling over and throwing in the towel. Instead, a working class led counteroffensive is emerging - so much so that it is fair to say a new phase of a struggle is afoot, in which labor and its allies could turn the tables decisively in their favor.

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The battle in Wisconsin electrified the whole country. But the counteroffensive is not just Wisconsin - it is national in scope, diverse in form, creative in tactics, and united in action. This nationwide tapestry of struggle is multi-threaded,

As we dig into today's struggles, it's not too early to be thinking about what has to be done to defeat right-wing extremism at the polls next year.

woven in varied patterns, loops and colors.

It is accompanied by a change in class mood, feeling and consciousness the likes of which we have not seen in recent decades. In the felt experience of tens of millions, capitalism isn't working for working people, the American Dream is crumbling, something better is needed.

The counteroffensive in my view dates back to the 2006 elections, where labor and its allies scored a victory and thus threw the Bush administration on the defensive for the first time.

It continued in 2008 when tens of millions danced in unison on the political stage and elected an African American president who promised a return from the far-right policies of the Bush years.

This augurs well for the future, even though Republicans at the state and federal level, fresh from a victory at the polls last fall, are pressing their advantage.

The GOP may register some victories, but they will be short lived.

In politics, winning and losing isn't a matter of simple arithmetic, not simply a matter of tally-

ing up what was won and what was lost. Rather, it depends on which side is able to expand its support, deepen its unity, and capture the initiative. It also depends on which side is best able to frame the debate and win the battle for public opinion. And on these counts, labor and the people's movements are scoring well.

Already casting a long and ever-present shadow over the nation's politics, economics and public discourse is the 2012 elections.

No struggle has the same possibility to rearrange the political balance of forces in a progressive direction as does the 2012 elections and its outcome. No other struggle has the same possibility to throw the working class and people's counteroffensive onto an entirely new forward trajectory.

Labor may have fewer financial resources in 2012, but its army of activists will be far bigger and its ground game will be bolder.



Sam Webb is chair of the Communist Party USA.

Follow Jimmy Carter's initiative on Cuba

By PW Editorial Board

During his trip to Cuba last week President Jimmy Carter called for ending the 50-year-old U.S. economic blockade of the island and freeing the Cuban Five, languishing in U.S. prisons. His statements are a major breakthrough. We urge our readers to immediately follow up with practical action to end the blockade, which hurts American workers as well as Cubans, and to bring freedom and justice to the Cuban Five, who were working to prevent terrorist attacks on Cuba.

Speaking on Cuban TV, Carter repeated his call for an end to the blockade. He added that he had already talked to Presidents Bush and Obama to urge the release of the Cuban Five. He called the original trial that convicted the five Cubans "very doubtful" and said their sentences were particularly unjust.

Two of the five, Gerardo Hernandez and Antonio Guerrero, have filed habeas corpus briefs to challenge their convictions. Hernandez was convicted of murder and given two life sentences be-

cause of the shooting down of two small aircraft that had been buzzing Havana illegally, an incident with which he argues he had no connection. He says in a new habeas corpus brief that he was not properly advised by counsel about the possibility of a separate trial on this count. The convictions came in a joke of a trial in Miami where, it was recently revealed by activists supporting the Five, the U.S. government had been secretly paying journalists to stir up local feeling against the defendants. This is the basis of Antonio Guerrero's habeas brief, which asks that his conviction and sentence of 21 years and 2 months be set aside.

We urge our readers to explain the case. Ask others to sign, and send to others via email or social networking tools, an online petition calling for release of the Five, which already has 1,000 signatures.

And contact your senators and representative and let them know you join Carter in wanting an end to the harmful blockade of Cuba.

The momentum is building for positive change on Cuba and the Cuban Five. Keep it going.

Paramilitaries alive and well in Colombia

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

Paramilitaries killed Bernardo Rios on March 23 in Uraba, Colombia, just like they killed 200 other peace activists in San Jose de Apartado. In Medellin the day after Rios's murder, someone killed 70-year-old David de Jesús Góez. He had testified against land takeovers. Reports proliferated that month of death threats against women, children and men.

Paramilitary forces have displaced over four million rural people from 16 million acres of land. Drug traffickers, paramilitary chieftains, big farm operators and mining and oil corporations have moved in. The death toll has ascended into the tens of thousands. Urged on by Washington, the government of President Alvaro Uribe took steps to deescalate the violence.

Under his 2005 Law of Justice and Peace, paramilitary leaders confessed to crimes and demobilized troops. In return, they received light sentences and guarantees they could keep stolen land. They and their underlings would be protected from future prosecution. But recent reports say 12,000 of the 30,000 supposedly retiring paramilitaries were unemployed men recruited for brief periods and given guns. And paramilitary killings continue.

In late 2010, Colombia's Congress gave initial approval to the "Law of Victims and Land Restitution." Critics object to its relieving the Attorney General and judiciary of responsibilities to investigate and prosecute crimes attributed to "groups outside the law." They protest executive branch assumption of judicial powers. The proposed law contains only nebulous provisions for the return of stolen land, but current President Juan Manuel Santos has promised that some 880,000 acres would be given back.

The practice of land restitution has so far fallen short. The Incoder land reform agency, for



example, returned 37 parcels in Magdalena stolen by paramilitaries under the command of "Jorge 40." Over just two months in 2003, that agency revoked peasant ownership of 134 tracts appropriated by paramilitaries in 13 municipalities. New owners, most of them colleagues of "Jorge 40," were given new titles. An online report claims direct local government negotiations with paramilitaries led to land transfers.

New verbiage hints at backing off from paramilitary demobilization. It crops up in the Attorney General's most recent annual report. The introduction to the section on the Law of Justice and Peace calls paramilitaries "criminal bands" and acknowledges U.S. overview. Roundabout language suggests irresolution.

Ivan Cepeda heads the Movement of Victims of State Crimes, or MOVICE, and represents the leftist Alternative Democratic Pole in Congress. Debating on March 23, Cepeda declared, "In Colombia the horrible night of paramilitarism has not ended. Its structures remain intact." He adds that "the Santos government wants to make it appear that criminal bands" are causing population displacement, when in fact "recycled paramilitary groups" are responsible.

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In Ohio, outrage at Kasich budget

By Rick Nagin

Moral outrage echoed throughout the sanctuary of Trinity Cathedral as public officials, labor, religious and community leaders denounced the “slash and sell” budget proposed by Republican Gov. John Kasich at a town hall meeting here March 31.

The proposal would cut state subsidies to local governments in half, Cleveland’s Mayor Frank Jackson said, adding he just learned that millions more will be lost as Kasich plans to speed up cuts in the commercial activities tax on corporations.

Ed Fitzgerald, the new Cuyahoga County executive, said layoffs in his departments have already begun and that the corporate-Republican “agenda was always there. It’s just manifesting itself now, taking advantage of the economic crisis.”

The privatization project has been turned over to a group, cynically named Jobs Ohio, a secret and semi-private agency.

Cuts to the public schools will mean 30,000 immediate layoffs with 14,000 more expected as a “ripple” effect, said Piet Van Lier, a researcher with Policy Matters Ohio. In addition, the schools, which educate 90 percent of Ohio’s children, will suffer a further hit as Kasich plans to increase funds for vouchers for private and charter schools.

State Senator Mike Skindell dismissed Kasich’s claim of an \$8 billion deficit as “a myth.” The real problem, he said, is the massive tax cuts to corporations and the very wealthy enacted under Republican Gov. Bob Taft in 2005. Amy Hanauer, director of Policy Matters Ohio, said tax cuts to the rich account for over half the deficit and closing some of the 128 tax loopholes and exemptions to corporations could actually produce a surplus.

Pared artificial frontera separa el campus de la Universidad de Arizona

Por Alexander Monarrez Maldonado

En lo que se considera como la mayor muralla “fronteriza” artificial en EEUU, profesores, empleados y estudiantes de la Universidad de Arizona ya están aprendiendo en carne propia la inconveniencia e la inhumanidad de una muralla que les separa a los seres humanos unos de los otros.

La obra, bautizada como “Muralla a muralla: Concrete Connections / Conexiones Concretas,” fue construida para enfocar la atención del público sobre las situaciones de la frontera México - Estados Unidos y en Palestina e Israel.

La “muralla,” alrededor de 1.000 pies de largo y seis pies de alto, tapada con alambre de púas, fue similar a muchas de las barreras que han sido utilizadas para separar a países y pueblos. La “muralla” dividía al campus en uno de sus sectores más frecuentados.

Participaba una organización estudiantil colgando varias fotografías tamaño 8 x 10” de familias divididas por las murallas. Muestra una foto a una señora que acaricia a su sobrina por una apertura en la cerca fronteriza, mientras muestre otra a una esposa mexicana que había conducido tres horas solo para mirar a su esposo tras la cerca, luego que fue deportado él.

Colgaban otras organizaciones mantas exigiendo un fin a las fronteras y a su militarización. Colgaba una organización una bandera palestina explicando cómo es que 3,8 millones de palestinos subsisten bajo ocupación militar ilegal Israelita, tras una muralla de 400 millas y 120 retenes de control.

El grupo de Asuntos Estudiantiles Chicanos / Hispanos colgaba fotos con biografías de figuras latinas como César Chávez y el congresista Raúl Grijalva, hijos e hijas de inmigrantes que han contribuido tanto a la sociedad norteamericana.

Contribuían el Club Sierra y los Defensores de la Fauna Silvestre [Defenders of Wildlife] mostrando cómo es que dañan la ecología y ponen en peligro la fauna silvestre las murallas fronterizas.

Funcionaban aperturas en la “muralla” como “controles” por donde tenían que pasar los profesores, empleados y estudiantes. Muchos comprendían su propósito, pero cuestionaban unos pocos la inconveniencia de tener que pasar por los “retenes.”

Aquí el punto no fue la de causar inconveniencia pero más bien para mostrar la necesidad de abrir un diálogo abierto con los que estén a favor de las fronteras, la separación a las familias, y las murallas, mostrándolos que no deben ser divididos los seres humanos solamente por su nacionalidad, sus creencias políticas o religiosas, o hasta por una línea en la arena nada más.

Enviaba la “muralla” un mensaje poderoso y se espera que fuesen abiertos algunos ojos en el proceso. Quizás algunos ya verían que la muralla fronteriza que queda a solo 60 millas del campus tiene cara y nombre, y que en este momento preciso hay seres amados sentados en algún lugar pensando y rogándole a Dios que estén reunidos pronto.