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McDonalds suggests worker “budget”

By John Wojcik

The McDonald's plan for how its workers can make it on their paltry salaries is all over the Internet now, just a day after the fast food giant posted it on a new website.

McDonald's has gotten together with Visa to launch an entire website that aims to “help” its workers who make, on average, \$8.25 per hour - not by raising their salaries, but by telling them how to budget their income.

The intended message of the site - Practical-MoneySkills.com - is that McDonald's workers should be able to live on their low wages. But it inadvertently illustrates exactly why it is almost impossible to get by on what the company pays.

The website sports a “sample monthly budget” for workers that totally distorts what one has to do to budget on a minimum wage job.

The “budget” assumes that the McDonald's employee will have a second job paying about \$1,000 a month to supplement the McDonald's job which itself pays only \$1,000 a month. (This, of course, amounts to an admission that it is impossible to live on a McDonald's salary alone.)

But the problem with the “budget” doesn't stop there. The estimates it gives for employees' costs must be drawn from either another planet or



some era that has long since gone by. It allows \$20 a month for health care, nothing at all for heat, and \$600 a month for rent. Not a penny is budgeted for food or clothing.

Assuming one can live without food, a McDonald's worker might have a chance of making that type of budget work if he or she lived north of the Arctic Circle in July and close to the Equator in January. (Minimize the need for both clothing and heat.)

T H I S W E E K :

- **McDonalds suggests worker “budget”**
- **Obama: Trayvon Martin could have been me**
- **Detroit's bankruptcy rooted in capitalism**
- **Los “Dreamers” Demandan Reformas**
- **Texans stand with women**

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But then that wouldn't work either. Although the budget includes \$150 a month for car payments it lists nothing for fuel or any other transportation costs.

Since McDonald's is an “equal opportunity” employer, the entire budget is available in Span-

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ish too. Written on the website, in your choice of English or Spanish, then, is the encouraging line: “You can have almost anything you want as long as you plan ahead and save for it.” (The Mickey D budget says its workers should be able to save \$100 a month.)

Nothing at all in the budget ends up approximating the realities workers face.

For an uninsured individual to buy health care coverage, he or she must pay at least \$200 a month for an individual plan. Even that will only buy coverage that has major gaps. You might, let’s say, get into a hospital but then have to figure out how to pay for anything they do to you while you are there.

Only a few full-time McDonald’s workers qualify for the company’s \$14 a week health care plan, but that plan stops paying out once the worker incurs costs of \$10,000 in any given year. A minor outpatient procedure at a hospital, with the necessary monitoring by a doctor, often costs more than that.

The McDonald’s budget, as we noted, assigns

\$0 per week for food. A very tight weekly food budget for an individual would be in the range of \$35 a week. It would be tough feeding a family of four, then, on anything less than \$900 a month.

What about the \$600 for rent? Rents are higher than that all around the country. In New York City, rents are now averaging \$3,000 per month.

McDonald’s workers, of course, have already made it clear that they won’t be satisfied with their employer handing them suggested budgets. They have been rising up, along with fast food workers all over the country, to demand a living wage.

There have been strikes and walkouts in cities across the nation, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington D.C., Seattle, Philadelphia, Miami and elsewhere.

In many cities workers have walked out of not just McDonald’s but also Burger King, Taco Bell, Subway, Domino’s and many other chains.



John Wojcik is co-editor of PeoplesWorld.org.

Obama: Trayvon Martin could have been me

By PW Editorial

Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago,” President Obama said Friday. He made that comment in remarks at the White House Press Briefing Room about the killing of the African American teenager and this week’s acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman.

Clearly moved by the tragedy, Obama said it was important for the country to reflect on the “context and how people have responded to it and how people are feeling.” The nation’s first African American president said, “I think it’s important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn’t go away.”

As no other president before him could have, Obama discussed the harsh experiences of Black young men and Black people in general in confronting racism in many forms, experiences that, he noted, he had shared. But the question now, he said, is “where do we take this? How do we learn some lessons from this and move in a positive direction?”

The president offered several practical steps he said his administration and others in positions of leadership could take. These included:

- * beefed up training of law enforcement officers in order to reduce racial profiling and “mistrust”

- * “examination” of state and local laws such as Florida’s “stand your ground” law that may feed conflict and violence rather than resolve them;

- * new and expanded programs to “bolster and reinforce” African American boys and young men.

“And for those who resist that idea that we should think about something like these ‘stand your ground’ laws, I’d just ask people to consider, if Trayvon Martin was of age and armed, could he have stood his ground on that sidewalk?”

Obama said. “And do we actually think that he would have been justified in shooting Mr. Zimmerman who had followed him in a car because he felt threatened? And if the answer to that question is at least ambiguous, then it seems to me that we might want to examine those kinds of laws.”

The president is right on target.

Obama discussed the harsh experiences of Black young men and Black people in general in confronting racism.

Detroit's bankruptcy rooted in capitalism

By John Rummel

It is the “culmination of sixty years of downward decline,” said Republican Governor Rick Snyder at the press conference announcing Detroit’s filing for bankruptcy. The 60-year part I agree with but the blame for that decline, and solutions Snyder and his appointed Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr proposed in today’s press conference, left key players in that decline blameless.

Snyder said Detroit’s “political class” is the last major obstacle to righting this city. He echoes Republican and Tea Party claims the Democratic Party (that has long governed the city) along with the city’s labor unions bear the onus for the current situation.

Many criticisms of the city harbor a large unhealthy dose of racism that implies the city’s main problem is a large minority population expecting government handouts.

Talk about living on the public trough. Exxon Mobil made \$45 billion in profits in 2009 but paid zero in taxes. General Electric made \$10.3 billion and received a \$1.1 billion dollar rebate; Wells Fargo had profits of \$19 billion and received tax credits of \$19 billion after the purchase of Wachovia Bank. The bank-caused, tax loss inducing foreclosure crisis resulted in a huge loss of tax base and population for the city. One could go on and on but those lost tax dollars could end Detroit’s and other municipalities’ problems once and for all.

It is no surprise Detroit has a financial problem. It is a one-industry city that went from twelve auto plants to one. Globalization, automation and



90 percent of its jobs and tax base. No city could survive such a loss.

If there is a political class to blame for corruption or dysfunction, Snyder should look no further than his own Republican Party and its endless list of extremist, authoritarian actions and anti-democratic policies.

Today, Emergency Manager Orr said “we can’t kick the can down the road any further.”

I agree with those words, but not Orr’s intent. Instead of trying to reign in pensions and public spending, we should rein in corporate profiteering and tax evasion. The capitalist system, based on profits before people, has accumulated huge riches from the labor of people, Detroit’s workers in the first place.

It is right to expect all elected officials to act in the public’s interest. But the main problem facing Detroit, other urban, suburban and rural areas is not corruption or labor unions seeking decent wages and benefits.

The main problem we face as a nation is not a lack of money; it is too much money in too few hands. Growing inequality, not budget deficits, are the country’s number one problem. Until that problem is solved, others will not go away.

The main problem facing Detroit, other urban, suburban and rural areas is not corruption or pensions: it’s capitalism.

Texas stand with women

By Jim Lane

While the Texas House was passing the most restrictive anti-abortion bill in America, last week, in Dallas 200 Texans attended a “Stand with Texas Women” rally and press conference in front of City Hall. The night before, some 1,100 attended a rally there.

No one has kept track of all the “Stand with Texas Women” rallies, but some are reported even in other states. The bus tour is being led by Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards.

Several Texas state senators, all Democrats, spoke out for women’s rights at the Dallas rally and press conference. County Judge Craig Jenkins also spoke. Most notable were City Councilwoman Monica Alonzo and state Sen. Sylvia Garcia of Houston, because it is sometimes alleged that Latino voters will never support women’s rights due to their Catholic commitment. Alonzo and Garcia don’t agree.

A big upsurge in participatory politics here began at the end of June, when a special session of the state legislature wound down. State Sen. Wendy Davis of Fort Worth carried out an exhausting filibuster to run out the clock before the Republican majority could pass their anti-abortion bill. Literally thousands of women from all over the state converged on the Capitol and have kept up their activism even after Gov. Rick Perry called a second special session specifically to pass the abortion bill.

Los “Dreamers” Demandan Reformas

Por Mark Gruenberg Translated by Gianluca Pérez Bucci

Hace seis años, Evelyn Riviera, en ese entonces una adolescente en vacaciones de primavera, vio a su madre arrestada y deportada. Esta semana, en Washington, D.C., Evelyn marchó por el regreso de su madre.

Según ella, cuando la arrestaron, estaban en su auto cuando un patrullero las detuvo. “Era por una infracción menor. Ni me recuerdo qué tipo era” Dijo Riviera. “Pero no tenía licencia de conducir”. Su madre, una inmigrante Colombiana, era indocumentada, dijo su hija.

“La arrestaron y le pusieron las esposas en mi presencia y se la llevaron a la cárcel local. En poco tiempo, tras una búsqueda en la computadora, descubrieron que no era residente legal, a pesar de haber vivido aquí en los EE.UU. por 15 años”.

“Así que estuvo detenida por cuatro meses - y luego la deportaron a Colombia”.

Desde entonces, Riviera y su hermana no han podido ver a su madre. Pero la deportación la inspiró a ser activista. Hoy, ella se encuentra en la posición de Coordinadora Regional del Sudeste para la organización “United We Dream”, el grupo que organizó la marcha está semana en Washington, D.C.

El Sindicato Internacional de Empleados de Servicios (SEIU) también apoyó la causa, gastándose \$200,000 en publicidades en estaciones emisoras para acumular apoyo popular en 10 distritos Republicanos críticos. El tema es particularmente importante para los “Dreamers”, de

quien 500 juraron lealtad a Estados Unidos el 10 de julio. Los coordinadores y líderes de los “Dreamers”, jóvenes traídos a Estados Unidos por sus padres indocumentados, hablaron sobre sus planes durante una rueda de prensa telefónica el 8 de julio. Los “Dreamers” han podido darle un rostro humano a la causa y cambiar opiniones sobre la reforma de inmigración.

Los “Dreamers”, como otros grupos que luchan por la reforma integral de la inmigración, desean que el Congreso establezca un proceso justo para que los 11 millones de inmigrantes indocumentados puedan obtener ciudadanía estadounidense. De estos 11 millones, 7.5 millones son adultos. Muchos son como Yolanda Riviera, gente que ha residido dentro de Estado Unidos a largo plazo y que sólo les falta ciudadanía oficial. Los otros tres millones son jóvenes, es en este grupo que se encuentran los “Dreamers”.

Los sindicatos particularmente apoyan la causa de los inmigrantes porque la reforma de inmigración les brindaría protección inmediata a los 11 millones de indocumentados bajo las leyes de trabajo de Estados Unidos aun antes de hacerse ciudadanos. Este cambio no sólo ayudaría a prevenir la explotación de los indocumentados por parte de patrones malévolos, sino que también impediría que los patrones se aprovecharan de esta situación al amenazar a los trabajadores con la posibilidad de contratar a los indocumentados, lo cual resulta en una baja del sueldo promedio y el nivel de vida de todos los trabajadores de Estados Unidos.