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Arrests at immigration protest spur new coalition

By John Wojcik

In a jail cell in the nation's capital top leaders of 40 powerful labor and progressive groups found they had plenty of time (six hours) to talk and hash out plans for essentially remaking America.

Communications Workers of America President Larry Cohen and Greenpeace Executive Director Phil Radford were among the 40 immigrant rights, labor, faith and community leaders arrested Aug. 1 for bringing traffic to a halt in the streets around Capitol Hill. Protesting what they say are unjust immigration policies, they told House Republicans that they intend to fight relentlessly for a comprehensive bill that benefits 11 million undocumented immigrants.

At a press conference today, Cohen and Radford announced that more than 80 organizations have now joined The Democracy Initiative - a coalition formed earlier this year by the CWA, Greenpeace, the Sierra Club and the NAACP.

The two said the 40 jailed activists agreed strongly yesterday that the coalition's aims should be getting: big money out of politics; immigration rights; voting rights; and stopping GOP obstruction in Congress. Everyone in the holding cell, they said, was celebrating what they considered at least one victory already against Republican



obstructionism - Tuesday's Senate confirmation of all five of President Obama's nominees to the National Labor Relations Board and nominees for other Cabinet positions including the Environmental Protection Administration.

Asked what immigration rights had to do with the environment, Greenpeace director Radford said, "Justice for workers and for immigrants, both of whom are marginalized, is important. They need to be included in the political process

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not just because they face environmental hazards daily on the job but also if we are to elect lawmakers who will take global warming seriously."

"We're not going to have a clean-energy economy if the same companies that are polluting our rivers and oceans are polluting our elections," said

The Democracy Initiative is a progressive answer to the big business right.

Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club.

“It was exciting and frankly wonderful that we all had the chance to be locked up together like that with nothing more than our clothes, ID cards and bail money,” said Cohen. “I learned more about them [the environmentalists] in those six hours than I could have any other way. When you bring together so many groups, or at least the leaders of them, like that you are bound to get good results.”

For his part, Radford said, “Talking in that cell to Arlene Holt-Baker [AFL-CIO secretary treasurer] was absolutely amazing. No better way to learn about the voting rights and labor movements and see what connects us all.”

“For decades now,” Radford said “the conservatives have aimed to shrink government - local, state and federal, by introducing new laws and installing like-minded politicians and judges. It has been a 40-year strategy by the Exxons, the Coors and the Kochs of the world to take over the country.”

“The Democracy Initiative is a progressive answer to that,” said Cohen. “Our CWA members and leaders know that we can’t end the frustration of current collective bargaining without a real movement not just for bargaining and organizing rights but for social and political change. That’s why we’re here. Working together is how we’ll win economic justice.”

The others thrown into the same jail cell Thursday represented a who’s-who of organizations including the League of Conservation Voters, Friends of the Earth, the Farmworkers, the AFL-CIO, Change to Win, the Service Employees, Common Cause, Voto Latino, the Demos think tank, Piper Fund, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, People for the American Way, National People’s Action, the National Organization for Women, the National Wildlife Federation, the Center for American Progress, the United Auto Workers, the Steelworkers, and Color of Change, to name only some.



John Wojcik is co-editor of PeoplesWorld.org.

Rep. Steve King should be censured

By PW Editorial

The comments of Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, which stereotype undocumented immigrants as drug smugglers, have embarrassed his own Republican Party. In remarks opposing the DREAM Act, King claimed that for every high school valedictorian who would get legal status that way, “there’s another 100 out there that weigh 130 pounds and they’ve got calves the size of cantaloupes because they’re hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert.”

The statement and others from politicians and talk show and print commentators, are so over the top that we might be tempted to mutter, “What a stupid, ignorant jerk.” But we can’t discount the possibility that, far from being rooted in stupidity and ignorance, these slurs are part of a clever plan.

The plan would be to convince U.S. voters that the country is endangered by a mass invasion of dangerous people, who are bringing drugs, terrorism and disease to our peaceful communities. Former CNN commentator Lou Dobbs was famous

for claiming, against all evidence, that immigrants from poor countries coming to the United States were causing a “sudden” epidemic of leprosy. Public health experts quickly pointed out that Dobbs’ information was totally false, noting in fact that leprosy is exceedingly uncommon in the U.S. and the numbers have been falling as immigration has been rising.

The overall impression such slanders are designed to create is that immigrants are dangerous and that the border must be “sealed” before anything else. But the border has more security under the Obama administration than it ever has had in the nation’s history, with more agents, more electronic surveillance and more fences. The Senate immigration bill, which Republican politicians claim does not do enough, in fact would add hugely to this false “security” overkill.

It’s high time to pass meaningful immigration reform. Security will come from a path to citizenship for immigrants and trade policies that provide labor rights and living wages to workers in the Americans. Rep. King should be censured for his remarks.

King’s slurs may be part of a larger plan.

Palermo's agrees to reinstate workers

By Mike Hall

In a settlement reached with the Palermo Workers Union and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), Palermo's Pizza has agreed to return eight fired workers to their former jobs with back pay.

The company also has agreed to post a notice in its Milwaukee plant informing workers of their rights under the National Labor Relations Act and to hold a union election.

The workers have been on strike since June 1, 2012, to protest unfair labor violations, workplace safety and to call for a voice on the job. After the workers requested that Palermo's recognize their union and bargain with them over serious workplace problems, Palermo's fired more than 75 workers.

Raul de la Torre, an organizing committee member of the Palermo Workers Union, says:

"Palermo's Pizza repeatedly violated our rights to join a union. This agreement confirms that Palermo's used threats, intimidation, surveillance, discrimination and retaliation to deny the freedom to choose a union voice."

The United Steelworkers (USW) union has been working closely with both the fired Palermo's workers and those currently on the job who are seeking a union voice. USW District 2 Director Mike Bolton called the settlement positive but also a disappointment, and said the following:

"It took much too long to get even this small bit of justice for these workers. And unfortunately, they will be going back to jobs where union-busters have created such an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that a democratic election is not possible. So for Palermo's to claim they want a



ployees-will never get to vote because they were fired for speaking out."

The Palermo Workers Union says there still are numerous issues related to the labor dispute at Palermo's Pizza that remain outstanding.

There is a pending NLRB settlement with BG Staffing, a temp agency that was the employer for numerous fired union supporters.

The NLRB is currently investigating recent charges that Palermo's illegally fired an African American employee who was engaged in pro-union activity at work.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is expected to open an investigation into Palermo's refusal to release federally mandated records of injuries, which have been requested by a lawfully designated representative of numerous employees.

Palermo's so far has refused requests from elected officials to provide evidence that they fulfilled promises to create family-supporting jobs with some of the \$48 million in taxpayer money they have received in recent years, including loans they received, via the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp.

Eight striking workers will be reinstated.

Las causas profundas de la inmigración indocumentada

Por Emile Schepers

La derecha ha retratado la inmigración indocumentada como una “invasión” de los revolucionarios y los criminales, orquestada por el gobierno mexicano, lo que es absurdo.

Las razones detrás de la inmigración laboral de América Latina y el Caribe están elocuentemente presentado por el periodista e historiador puertorriqueño Juan González en su libro “Harvest of Empire: Una historia de los latinos en los Estados Unidos (Edición revisada 2011, Penguin),” y en otros estudios. Las sucesivas intervenciones militares de Estados Unidos en América Latina han tenido una influencia importante como estímulo en la inmigración masiva a los EE.UU. El derrocamiento en 1954 del progresista y democráticamente electo presidente guatemalteco Jacobo Arbenz por la administración Eisenhower, motivado por el deseo de proteger los intereses de la United Fruit Company, condujo a una guerra civil que duró hasta la década del 1990 y produjo la muerte de más de 200.000 personas, la mayoría a manos de los aliados estadounidenses: los militares y los escuadrones de la muerte de la ultra derecha.

Miles huyeron a través de la frontera hacia México y algunos terminaron en los EE.UU.

Acompañando a todas estas intervenciones está el factor de las relaciones comerciales desiguales.

En México, varios millones de agricultores de granos han sido ex-

pulsados de la tierra por la desleal competencia agroindustrial de los EE.UU. y el Canadá. Los empleos que se suponían iban a materializarse en otras áreas de la economía mexicana no lo han hecho. Las aseveraciones en los medios de comunicación de los EE.UU. de que la inmigración de México ha bajado debido a que México ya no es un país pobre deben ser tomadas con mucho cuidado. En muchos pueblos y pequeñas ciudades de México, prácticamente no hay jóvenes que queden y que pudiesen emigrar, y los habitantes que quedan viven de los \$ 24 mil millones de dólares que los inmigrantes mexicanos los envían cada año desde los EE.UU.

Hay un aumento de la inmigración indocumentada de Guatemala, Honduras y El Salvador, a pesar de la publicidad sobre el hecho de que las bandas de narcotraficantes están acechando a los inmigrantes en su camino a través de México a los Estados Unidos, secuestrándoles por rescates y a veces asesinandolos.

Las personas que están dispuestos a correr el riesgo de estas depredaciones no van a ser disuadidos por una muralla, sobre todo si ya tienen cónyuges e hijos en los EE.UU. a los que están tratando de volver. Ellos dependerán aún más de los contrabandistas de inmigrantes, que están cada vez más controlados por bandas criminales, para cruzar en zonas fronterizas aún más peligrosas en donde cada vez más inmigrantes mueren cada año.

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