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Obama lays out vision for the economy



By John Wojcik

Launching a series of speeches on the economy at Knox College in Gatesburg, Ill. President Obama - whether by calling for raising the minimum wage or by describing an America where universal pre-school would be taken for granted - laid out his vision for the future, exposing Republicans as near-sighted and small-minded by comparison.

The president was returning to the college yesterday, the place where he had come to deliver the commencement address for the class of 2005. It was his first major speech back then after having been newly elected as a U.S. senator from Illinois.

The president framed the economic tasks ahead of the country as one of fixing structural problems that go well beyond the current financial crisis which, he said, was only exacerbating fundamental problems that have been going on for decades. He framed the battle ahead as one that would have to “reverse the forces that have conspired against the middle-class for decades - that has to be our project.

“Even though our businesses are creating new jobs and have broken record profits, nearly all the income gains of the past 10 years have continued to flow to the top one percent,” Obama declared.

“The average CEO has gotten a raise of nearly 40 percent since 2009, but the average American earns less than he or she did in 1999. And companies continue to hold back on hiring those who have been out of work for some time.”

Obama made a strong case for his belief that such inequality is more than just “morally wrong,” but that it is also, on a practical level, “bad economics.”

“When middleclass families have less to

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spend,” the president explained, “businesses have fewer customers. When wealth concentrates at the very top, it can inflate unstable bubbles that threaten the economy. When the rungs on the ladder of opportunity grow further apart, it undermines the very essence of the country.”

The president argued that strengthening the economy would require jobs and raising the minimum wage.

The president argued that strengthening the middle class would require many things, not the least of which was a higher minimum wage and higher wages generally. His list included affordable education for all, government created jobs to fix infrastructure, massive worker training programs, universal broadband, and mortgage refinancing, among other things.

The speech drew a sharp contrast with Republican policies, centered as they are around trumped-up political scandals, spending cuts and phony debt ceiling crises.

“If you ask some of these Republicans about their economic agenda, or how they’d strengthen the middle class, they’ll shift the topic to ‘out of control’ government spending. Short term thinking and stale debates are not what this moment requires,” Obama said. “I say to these members of Congress: I am laying out my ideas to give the middle class a better shot. Now it’s time for you to lay out yours.”

Obama is seen, because of yesterday’s speech, as rising above the fray as Republicans continue

their insistence on more budget cuts in advance of the fall, the time for the next budget and debt-ceiling battle. Economists have already said that Republican threats to shut down the government in several months pose an immediate threat to the economy.

“They want to shut government down, I want to make it work for you,” the president said to sustained applause yesterday.

“Repealing Obamacare and cutting food stamps is not an economic program,” the president said at another point, again to sustained applause.

The Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, tried to brush off Obama’s speech yesterday. “Americans aren’t looking for more speeches,” he said. “They’re looking for jobs.”

“Don’t believe any Republican when he tells you he is concerned about jobs,” said Sara Williams, a cashier at a Bridgeport supermarket here.



John Wojcik is co-editor of PeoplesWorld.org.

It’s time to shine the light on ALEC

By PW Editorial

ALEC is an outfit controlled and financed by some of the biggest corporate financial barons.

As we deal with a barrage of state-funded legislative battles, such as Voter ID attacks on voting rights, destruction of public education by diverting taxpayer funding to private, for-profit charter schools, abolition of public sector unions, environmental protections and common sense gun laws, etc., it is important that we understand exactly who is behind them.

The answer? The American Legislative Council, known as ALEC. ALEC is an outfit controlled and financed by some of the biggest corporate financial barons. They have been concentrating on state campaigns with considerable success.

State legislators return from ALEC meetings and bring back “model bills” to their home legislatures, introducing them as their own bills. More than 98 percent of ALEC’s revenue comes from corporations, their trade groups, and foundations. ExxonMobil gave \$1.4 million in “grant money” to ALEC from 1998-2009. Corporate members donated \$4 million to send lawmakers on trips.

Groups have begun to expose ALEC. Two

years ago, on April 29, 2011, hundreds gathered to protest ALEC for the first time outside the group’s spring meeting in Cincinnati.

People for the American Way says ALEC is a “right wing public policy organization, with an agenda for privatizing public services, restricting government regulations on corporations and finance capital.”

ALEC was founded in September 1973 by a small group of legislators and policy makers including Lou Barnett, a veteran of Ronald Reagan’s presidential campaign, Illinois Representative Henry Hyde, together with a handful of others, including the infamous oil barons Charles and David Koch, who were feted for their family’s role in founding the hate group, John Birch Society. Included in this list of right wing conspirators is John Kasich, who made use of ALEC’s millions in corporate funds to win the governorship of Ohio.

A bright light of peoples’ democratic rights needs to shine on and expose the threatening shadow ALEC is casting over the 2014 elections in Ohio and elsewhere, and all other functions of our democratic way of life.

California prison hunger strike continues

By Marilyn Bechtel

A hunger strike by California prison inmates protesting prolonged solitary confinement is now well into its fourth week, despite harassment of strikers including moving strike leaders into even deeper isolation.

The strike, which started July 8, resumed protests begun two years ago when inmates held two three-week-long hunger strikes. This time some 30,000 inmates across the California prison system started refusing meals - the largest prisoner protest ever in the state. As of July 22, prison officials said over 700 were still on strike in 10 prisons.

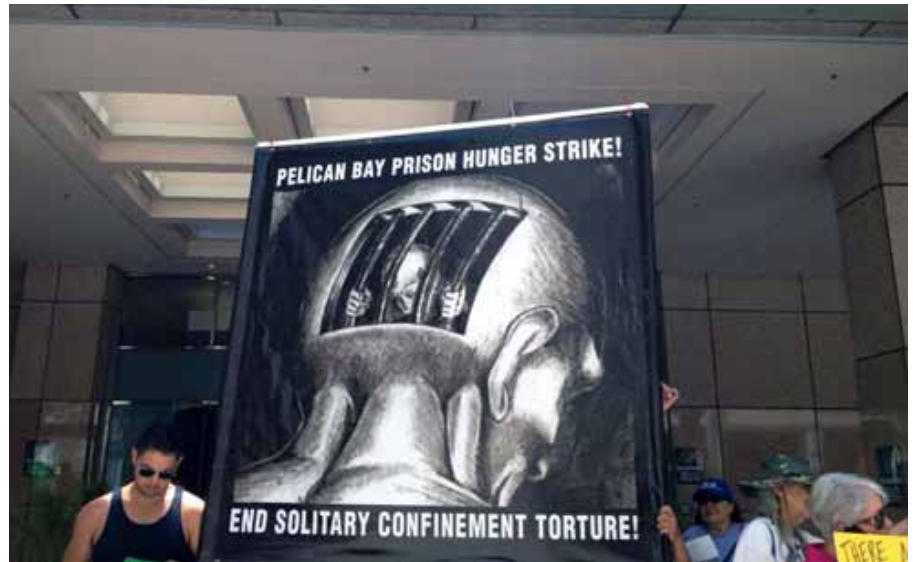
Over 3,000 inmates are reportedly in solitary confinement in California; some are serving specific terms for particular offenses while others are confined for an indefinite period.

Nearly all inmates who land in solitary confinement in Secure Housing Units, or SHUs, are there because of alleged ties to prison gangs, including being seen talking with gang members, having gang-related tattoos or reading materials.

Though the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) says a program it started last fall eases the criteria for assuming gang ties and sets up a path to move out of solitary confinement, inmates say the main way to get out of the SHU is still "debriefing," or informing on another inmate.

While the new procedures do offer a path out of the SHU without snitching, the process is still tortuous, Laura Magnani, program director for healing justice with the American Friends Service Committee's San Francisco office, said in a telephone interview.

Prison authorities "are holding hearings on everyone, but so slowly that most inmates in solitary confinement don't feel it," she said. "Half



in solitary.

The prisoners say placing them in prolonged isolation - in some cases for over 20 years - amounts to torture. Their "core demands" include ending group punishment, changing the way inmates are determined to be gang members, ending long-term solitary confinement, providing enough nutritious food, and providing more constructive programs and activities for SHU inmates.

Early in the strike, 14 inmates publicly identified as protest leaders were moved into deeper isolation in "Administrative Segregation." Attorneys said authorities had taken legal papers from some of them. One attorney was barred from meeting with inmates.

Security Housing Units were set up in 1989 and were originally intended for punishments of no more than 180 days. But at Pelican Bay State Prison, about 500 inmates have been in SHUs for over 10 years, about 80 of them for over 20 years. Each SHU is a windowless 80 square foot cell with a meal slot in its perforated steel door. Beds and desks are formed from concrete slabs molded to the wall. Inmates exercise alone in a tiny concrete pen. Occasional visitors provide the only human contact.

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Danville, Va., marches for Trayvon

By Art Cook

Hundreds of residents of this Southern city of Danville Virginia showed up for a peaceful march July 20 to remember the life, and tragic killing, of Trayvon Martin. Danville is a 50 percent African-American town in the middle of the Virginia-North Carolina border.

The march was peaceful, but its message was clear.

“What do we want?” “Justice!” “When do we want it?” “Now!”

An all-white jury acquitted Martin’s killer George Zimmerman of murder charges earlier this month, sparking outrage from African American communities across the country.

Danville resident Twyla Grasty felt that racial profiling and injustice are alive in this city as well as in the Martin case, but also urged everyone to work on reversing violence.

“We need to come to come together as a city to do what we need to do to stop the violence,” Grasty said.

Leaniqua Jackson’s son, Lamonte “CoCo” Stone, was shot and killed in 2009. She organized the march in memory of her son and the injustice that followed his death. Her son’s killer was convicted of voluntary manslaughter rather than first-degree murder, and he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Jackson said the outcome of Zimmerman’s trial was also an injustice.

“Children are being labeled and profiled and killed on the street,” Jackson said. “We need to stand up for each other.”

FLOC lucha por liberación de activista mexicano

Por Luis Santoyo

Baldemar Velásquez, el presidente del Comité de Organización de Campesinos (FLOC, por sus siglas en inglés) con sede en Ohio, estuvo en la cárcel dos veces en menos de una semana.

Este pasado primero de julio el líder sindical terminó tras las rejas a raíz de su participación en una protesta pacífica, llamada El Lunes Moral (Moral Monday, en inglés) en Raleigh, Carolina del Norte. Tres días después, visitó al preso político más famoso de México, Alberto Patishtán Gómez, en un penal estatal en Chiapas, México.

Con la protección de varios guardias armados profesionales, Velásquez se reunió con el profesor indígena y activista Patishtán, quien ha estado tras las rejas desde el 2000 por, entre otros cargos, su presunta participación en una emboscada en junio de 2000 en donde fallecieron siete policías y otros dos resultaron heridos.

“El caso de Alberto Patishtán es una mancha negra sobre el gobierno de México”, declaró Velásquez al periódico mexicano La Jornada luego de visitar al profesor tzotzil en el penal número cinco del municipio de San Cristóbal de las Casas. “El sistema de justicia está al revés. Las personas deben probar que son inocentes, en vez de lo contrario”.

Según el periódico The Blade con sede en Toledo, Ohio, una de las principales razones detrás de la visita de Velásquez a México es comenzar a organizar y trabajar con residentes

chiapanecos desempleados, abogados de derechos humanos en esa nación y funcionarios del gobierno de Estados Unidos.

Hasta la fecha, decenas de organizaciones alrededor del mundo se han pronunciado a favor de la libertad de Patishtán. El sitio mexicano de noticias Sin Embargo.mx señala en un artículo que la organización internacional de derechos humanos, Amnistía Internacional encontró que “hubo serias fallas en el proceso” judicial del activista, tales como irregularidades y contradicciones en la declaración del testigo que identificó a Patishtán como responsable de los delitos antes mencionados. Además este reportaje afirma que el testimonio de este testigo se tomó en cuenta, mientras que la evidencia indicando que Patishtán estaba en otro lugar al momento de la emboscada fue descartada.

Hasta el actual gobernador de Chiapas, Manuel Velasco Coello, elegido en julio de 2012, ha indicado que Patishtán “no debió ser encarcelado”.

Si México “quiere ser llamado un país democrático, esto no se puede repetir”, declaró Velásquez a La Jornada. “Vamos a seguir empujando por su libertad”.

El dirigente sindical y miembro del Consejo Ejecutivo de la AFL-CIO, añadió que correría la voz sobre el caso de Patishtán en Estados Unidos a través de las redes de FLOC, así como a través de pláticas con la representante demócrata de Ohio Marcy Kaptur, miembro del Caucus Progresista del Congreso.

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