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Labor exposes Alabama law to world scrutiny

By Mark Gruenberg

Labor has taken its campaign against Alabama's racist, anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant law international. The Steelworkers are pressuring the state's most-influential employer to publicly oppose Alabama's law. And the Service Employees filed a formal complaint against Alabama, and the U.S. government for lack of action, with the International Labour Organization.

The Steelworkers' campaign, aided by La Raza Unida and a wide-ranging coalition of civil rights groups, may have the greater potential. That's because, USW Vice President Fred Redmond says, Daimler-Benz swings great corporate weight in the state. Where the automaker leads, he says, other Alabama businesses will follow.

The Service Employees sent its legal case to the ILO. It said the Alabama law violates two ILO conventions, as well as international labor rights standards. But the ILO has no enforcement power either to make Alabama repeal the law or force the U.S. government to take stronger action against the state.

Redmond and his colleagues presented the case against Alabama's law, HB56, to Daimler's board, officers and shareholders at the firm's Apr. 4 stockholders' meeting in Berlin. Daimler-Benz' Alabama plant, which makes Mercedes-Benz vehicles for the U.S. market, employs 1,500 workers and generates a \$10 billion economic impact.

They also reminded Daimler-Benz brass the auto firm has signed an international code of corporate conduct on labor rights, and the Alabama law flunks those standards.



HB56, pushed through the heavily Republican Alabama legislature by a right-wing governor, brought national notoriety to the state for its racism and open prejudice against anyone Hispanic. The law criminalizes undocumented workers by forcing anyone whom police stop to immediately produce proof of the right to reside in the U.S. or face immediate arrest, detention, and deportation. It also outlaws the workers' ability to sign contracts, turns school principals into enforcement agents quizzing kids about whether they and their parents are legal, and says anyone aiding an undocumented worker is a criminal, too.

T H I S W E E K :

- Labor exposes Alabama law to world scrutiny
- Editorial: Ryan budget: A nightmare in the making
- Louisiana plan draws support, raises concern
- CWA rallies for contracts at AT&T
- Perfilamiento racial en East Haven

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Alabama's law is so bad, says U.W. Clemon, a retired federal judge from the state, that it recalls

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the days of "states' rights," when Southern states used that doctrine to justify Jim Crow laws and other repressive measures against Blacks.

"We know the reason [Daimler-Benz] located there in Alabama is because it has some of the worst labor protections in the U.S.," Redmond said by telephone after the presentation in Berlin. Stockholders applauded. Business and legislative leaders in Alabama "told us that if Daimler-Benz speaks up, the law would be changed," he added.

"We're encouraged they're in discussions" with other businesses and with state and federal Alabama lawmakers about next moves, Redmond said of Daimler-Benz. But, he added, "that also implies they're waiting for federal legislation" on immigrants' rights - including working without fear of deportation. Such a law is unlikely.

SEIU accused the U.S. government of breaking two international labor rights conventions on freedom of association by not acting strongly against HB56. The Obama administration sued in federal court in Alabama to overturn HB56. The judge there threw out parts of it.

If the ILO rules for SEIU and against the U.S., the ILO can urge the U.S. to fix labor law violations, but it can't force the federal government or Alabama to do so.

SEIU told ILO that HB56 forced families to flee the state in fear. SEIU also said unions can't organize - organizers would be criminals for contacting undocumented workers - and workers can't get paid, even if they're covered by a union contract, because of the law's bans on signing and enforcing contracts with the undocumented.

"The fact that the violations are the work of an individual state does not insulate the U.S. from responsibility," SEIU President Mary Kay Henry and Secretary-Treasurer Eliseo Medina wrote. They called the administration's anti-HB56 actions "simply insufficient to protect these workers and our trade union now, or into the future, without a deeper commitment to federal legislative reform." U.S. inaction let states flagrantly violate international norms, SEIU's case concluded.



Mark Gruenberg writes for PAI News.

Ryan budget: A nightmare in the making

By PW Editorial Board

As if conservative Supreme Court Justices laying plans to cut millions off of health insurance weren't bad enough last week, House Republicans approved a budget that is far worse than any reasonable person could, up to now, have imagined.

Pink slime may be disgusting but, unlike Rep. Paul Ryan's, R-Wis., budget, at least it has some nutritional value, wrote New York Times columnist Paul Krugman.

The Republican budget trumps anything that has ever come out of Congress first for its sheer cruelty and disregard for human suffering.

It slashes taxes for the rich and for corporations by huge amounts on top of the tax cuts they already wallow in as a result of handouts given them during the Bush years. It practically eliminates all help to the poor in terms of food and medical care. Then, on top of that, it claims that it will close the deficit but offers no proposal as to how that would be done. Whatever there is in the budget that would shrink the deficit is kept completely secret.

James Surowiecki, who writes on the Financial Page of New Yorker Magazine, said the budget, under the guise of getting the nation's finances under control, was an attempt to "repeal the

twentieth century."

Ryan's claim that his budget reduces the deficit is an outright lie. It leaves wide open the biggest single tax loophole known to the rich and to the big corporations - the obscenely low tax on capital gains.

Ryan's budget is also the height of hypocrisy. Over and over it speaks of the need for "efficiency" but leaves untouched the military budget that continues to drain the lifeblood of our country.

Ryan's budget is, in fact, the perfect recipe to plunge the nation into a double dip recession, at the least, and, more likely, into a deep depression. Combine his budget with \$1.3 trillion in automatic cuts next January that result from the last so-called bipartisan disaster deal and with the scheduled expiration of President Obama's middle class tax cuts and we could well expect a depression of unprecedented magnitude.

We will not wake up to the nightmare budget as long as Barack Obama is president of the United States. But it has been endorsed by the likely Republican candidate for the presidency, Mitt Romney. There is hardly a better reason to turn out full force for the 2012 elections - not just to re-elect the president but to defeat every single corporate-backed right-winger on Capitol Hill.

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Louisiana plan draws support but raises concern among fishermen

By Blake Deppe

A statewide poll on Louisiana's 2012 Coastal Master Plan has revealed that 86 percent of the 801 residents surveyed support a legislative vote for the plan, which was put forward by the state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority. The plan would fix significant environmental problems and repair the state's receding coastline.

The survey, conducted by Southern Media and Opinion Research, also showed that 91 percent of correspondents believe Louisiana's coast and wetlands are very important to it.

The 50-year plan's goals include developing strategies to protect coastal areas from hurricane flooding, building new coastal land, protecting the area's culture and ensuring job growth, and calling for improved levees in highly populated areas. It would also create a long-term program involving raising buildings out of potential flood zones.

The plan was developed after a two-year period of analysis involving some of the best scientists in the state, joined by national and international environmental specialists. From the results of the study, 109 projects were selected, each showing that it could benefit the community and ecosystem over the coming years.

This, more than anything, is a direct response to the land loss crisis Louisiana is going through; since the 1930s, 1,880 square miles of land have been slowly eroded, which reportedly interferes with the lives of coastal residents, particularly during storms.

Some of the problems with the proposed plan were laid out by a leading member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, many of whose members fish not only the waters of the Gulf of Mexico but also in the waters of the Louisiana bayou.

Chad Lauga, political director for the union's Local 130, and, himself a fisherman, said the plan



will create jobs and is “a step in the right direction” but that “there are problems with it. They need to bring together a diverse group of people for a project like this, and I feel like the fishermen have been left out of it.”

They're going the wrong way about this, he said, and as a result, “it's going to kill the oyster industry.”

A diversion dam essentially diverts the flow of water from its natural course. The scientists involved in the project saw doing this as a means of restoring the coastline, via redirecting the water current. That, however, will bring fresh water in, killing all of the oysters.

Still, Lauga noted, the Master Plan isn't all bad; in fact, he remarked, there's a bill in the legislature that would potentially create lots of local construction jobs. “So yeah,” he said, “we're coming leaps and bounds from where we were.”

What could have been remedied, though, he pointed out, was including fishermen in the initial consulting phases for the plan. “You need to bring everybody to the table, not just the scientists. Fishermen know that bringing in fresh water will kill the oysters. They've been trying to tell that to scientists and engineers, but they're being left out of the process.

“It's not that it's a bad plan,” he concluded. “It's just about who's in control.”

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CWA rallies for contracts at AT&T

By Joelle Fishman

Hundreds of AT&T workers and their families filled the New Haven Green Saturday with a sea of red t-shirts and Communications of America signs, "Fighting for the American Dream."

They were gathered on the Easter/Passover holiday weekend to rally for a fair contract and back up their negotiating team in the final hours before their contract expired.

The company, the largest unionized private sector employer in the nation, which posted a \$20 billion profit last year, is attempting to cut health care and retiree benefits and outsource jobs.

"If Moses were here today, he would say to Pharaoh AT&T, "Let my people have a contract!" declared CT AFL-CIO president John Olsen.

AT&T workers from New York and other New England states came to show the solidarity of all CWA locals in the face of an attempt by this corporate giant to strip workers of benefits and outsource jobs.

Solidarity was expressed by the presence of Occupy and community groups, speeches from other unions including the building trades, machinists, and Unite Here, and elected officials. All said they would stand by CWA workers whenever they are in need.

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-3) proudly waved her CWA union card. She warned that Republicans would do away with unions and worker rights. U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal also praised the workers for standing together and emphasized that the upcoming election is about the future of the labor movement and the direction of the nation. "You will make history here," he said.

Sat Luciano, executive director of Council 4 AFSCME, called the struggle one for human rights.

Perfilamiento racial en East Haven

Por Wilmer Barzallo

Gran sorpresa y malestar en la comunidad ha causado la "privada" reunión que había tenido efecto al mediodía 16 de marzo en East Haven. En esta participaron los representantes ecuatorianos Nathalie Cely (embajadora) y Raúl Erazo (ministro cónsul) con el alcalde de East Haven Joseph Maturo y otras autoridades locales.

Cualquier intento por acercar a las comunidades y a las autoridades debería ser visto como una buena iniciativa sin tan solamente los mencionados funcionarios ecuatorianos mostrasen compromiso y sensibilidad hacia la delicada situación de violación a los derechos humanos que han tenido que soportar decenas de compatriotas. Por mucho tiempo la comunidad ha vivido en pánico. El abuso, acoso y hostigamiento por parte del Departamento de Policía de East Haven habían llegado a ser simplemente intolerables.

En ningún momento autoridad ecuatoriana alguna se hizo presente para defender o brindar apoyo a las víctimas. El cónsul ecuatoriano en New Haven Raúl Erazo incluso en contra de su deber constitucional trató de encontrar cualquier excusa para no "involucrarse".

Al tiempo presente, cuando la efervescencia de East Haven ha alcanzado niveles nacionales e internacionales las mencionadas autoridades ecuatorianas en el contexto del más grande hermetismo y con el completo desconocimiento de la comunidad se reúnen con autoridades locales, el alcalde de New Haven John DeStefano, y Joseph Maturo entre otros, para según Raúl Erazo "exponer el Ecuador al mundo", y para "compartir comida ecuatoriana".

La comunidad sin embargo esperaba respuestas.

La oportunidad se dió en el encuentro que tuvieron las autoridades ecuatorianas con la comunidad aquel mismo día en el consulado de New Haven. El Sr. Luis Rodríguez, vicepresidente de la Comunidad de Inmigrantes de East Haven expresó su malestar. Señaló que las mencionadas autoridades "hicieron la reunión con el alcalde de East Haven y nosotros como organización, como afectados ni siquiera hemos estado enterados", "¿dónde estamos?, ¿queremos trabajar juntos?, ¿qué es lo que queremos?" preguntaba. La embajadora Cely respondió que "no entendía porque se debía invitar a una organización a un almuerzo privado", y que "no se debiese dudar de su buena fé para tender puentes y espacios de participación".

La comunidad no espera en ningún momento de sus autoridades invitaciones a cenas. Tan solo exige y demanda atención. La comunidad considera una "bufonada" "el reunirse con una autoridad insensible a la prácticas racistas de su departamento de policía sin ni siquiera escuchar el sentir de las víctimas a las cuales supuestamente representan, "¿Tienen facultades reales para decidir a libre arbitrio por sus súbditos?", se preguntan.

Los ciudadanos ecuatorianos sin duda pensarán que con la actitud demostrada por sus representantes no es difícil entender porque los "repugnantes" y racistas comentarios del alcalde Maturo de "merendar tacos" como acción en favor de los latinos no es más para el cónsul Erazo que "una carencia de entendimiento cultural".

Erazo sin duda ignora, desconoce, o simplemente no le interesa saber que gran parte de los Estados Unidos demanda la renuncia de Maturo por su insensibilidad e irrespeto a la comunidad latina.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523

Email: contact@peoplesworld.org