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Shock and awe at the NRA convention, a 2012 happening

By Tony Pecinovsky

Semi-automatic weapons, silencers, night vision devices, scantily-clad women posing with guns and signing souvenir posters, people who seemed a bit too paranoid - or perhaps in need of some type of medication - good guys who might just be confused and Mitt Romney talking about his new path for America, it was all part of the 141st Annual Convention of the National Rifle Association held April 13-15 in Saint Louis. What a happening for the NRA! And they are considered to be the most influential lobbying group in the U.S.

For his part, Romney said, in a speech as lacking in substance as it was overflowing with broad platitudes, that “our economy is fueled by freedom,” which the Obama administration, of course, is bent on destroying.

Romney was the keynote speaker at the NRA’s Celebration of American Values Leadership Forum, which also included Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum and Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker - among others.

Some participants were engaged in political discussion and attended workshops and seminars on “grassroots campaigning in a national election year” or “strategies for gun owners.”

Most NRA members seemed to be at the convention, however, for less political reasons. Many shopped in the exhibit hall, talked with other gun enthusiasts or attended workshops.

James Harold Agne, an NRA member since 1966, talked with the People’s World about the Trayvon Martin shooting in Florida. He said, George Zimmerman “has to take some kind of re-



sponsibility.”

While Agne supports so-called “Stand Your Ground” laws, he added, “I would have stepped back” and removed myself from the situation. Agne’s general sentiment was that Zimmerman was wrong in pursuing Martin after calling the police and being told to desist.

When asked “Why does the NRA support anti-union candidates when so-many NRA members are union members?” Agne said, “It’s not that the NRA is anti-union. It’s that the union bosses are anti-second amendment.”

While Agne - who isn’t a hunter - seemed like

T H I S W E E K :

- **Shock and awe at the NRA convention**
- **Editorial: Close the gender wage gap!**
- **At CPUSA conference, delegates look to the future**
- **New Yorkers deliver Tax Day message to 1%**
- **Argentina: Recuperando soberanía**

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a reasonable and nice guy, he was obviously very afraid of larger, misunderstood political forces

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that might someday, some-how destroy his freedom and take away his guns.

He was convinced, for example, that President Obama wants to “use the UN to have all arms removed from free people.”

Referring to the Republican and Democratic Parties, Agne said, “One group believes in freedom. The other group wants to control people.” Agne proudly wore the NRA’s Convention Election Year button. It said, “All In!” and was meant to imply that NRA members should be active participants in this year’s elections.

At the American Values Leadership Forum, Romney tapped into what seems to be an overarching fear for many NRA members. He said, the Obama Administration has “assaulted our economic, religious and personal freedoms.”

He added, the Affordable Care Act “violates the constitution” and if Obama wins a second term “he would be unrestrained to do what he wants.”

Outside of the Convention center about a half-dozen union members and sportsmen protested Romney’s visit to St. Louis.

Ed McNeese, president of UAW Local 282 and an avid hunter, called Romney a “flip-flopper” and said, “he isn’t in touch with union members.”

Steve Johnson, an organizer with Teamsters Local 688 and former Marine, said, “Romney’s anti-labor stance is an issue for me.”

Republican presidential hopeful, Newt Gingrich, also addressed the Forum and stoked many participants fears when he said, “The NRA is too timid. The second amendment is an amendment for all mankind.”

The NRA Convention was largely male dominated with very few people of color attending. Right-wing shock-jock Glenn Beck addressed the Convention, as did rock guitarist Ted Nugent.

When asked about the nature of our democracy - with its checks-and-balances and limited powers granted to the executive branch - Agne said, “The best checks-and-balances are an armed population. I love freedom. That’s the balance of power between the federal government and us.”



Tony Pecinovsky writes for the People’s World.

Close the gender wage gap!

By PW Editorial Board

A new report released today on Equal Pay Day shows that the yearly median pay for women in America is \$10,784 less than their male counterparts.

African American women and Latinas are far worse off, earning \$19,575 and \$23,873 less than men, respectively.

If the gap were eliminated, the report by the National Partnership for Women and Families says, women in the state of Washington could buy an additional 1.7 years’ worth of food. Colorado’s working women could afford 2,746 more gallons of gas. Women in Wisconsin could afford 14 more months of rent, and Connecticut women could pay for 3.7 years’ worth of family health insurance premiums.

“This shows just how much harm the wage gap foes to women and families throughout the country,” said National Partnership President Debra Ness. “With state economies struggling and women increasingly serving as the sole or co-breadwinners for their families, tens of thousands of dollars in lost wages each year takes a tremendous toll.”

Fifteen million households are headed by women, and almost 30 percent of them live below the poverty level. Full-time working women are

paid, on average, only 77 cents for every dollar paid to fill-time working men.

According to the report that gap results in loss of income needed for basic necessities. Legislation alone, is not achieving the desired results, according to women’s groups.

Since the Equal Pay Act passed in 1963, the wage gap has been closing at a rate of less than half a percent per year. At that rate women’s wages will not catch up to men’s for 40 years.

“The Equal Pay Act was enacted 49 years ago and women are still paid 23 cents less than men on the dollar,” Ness said. “Today, the wage gap causes great harm to women and their families and it spans industries and persists regardless of education level.”

Ness said there is an urgent need for lawmakers to do more to promote fairness in pay. The Paycheck Fairness Act must be passed now!

The Paycheck Fairness Act, which would close loopholes in the Equal Pay Act and establish stronger workplace protections for women was passed by the House in the last two Congresses but was filibustered in the Senate by Republicans in 2010. It has been reintroduced into the current Congress.

This is what is needed if victory is to be achieved in November.

At CPUSA conference, delegates look to the future

By Blake Deppe

We are gathered at a truly crucial moment in today's history," said Lisa Bergmann, the National Coordinator for the Young Communist League, at the second annual Communist Party USA national conference. "Let's fight together, let's win together."

Various Communists from all over the country gathered in solidarity to discuss the matters of the upcoming election and the sociopolitical implications of the current capitalist stronghold on this country. Matters such as racism, attacks on women, attacks on the LGBT community, and attacks on the environment were discussed, led by a powerful opening speech by CPUSA Chair Sam Webb.

After hearing Webb outline various stages in the long-term struggle for socialism in the United States, starting with the need to decisively defeat the extreme right in the 2012 elections, other delegates stepped up, one by one, to offer their experiences, outlooks, and hopes for the future.

In particular, said CPUSA Vice Chair Juan Lopez, "Racism is the right wing's most powerful ideological weapon. Nothing else carries the same potential to derail the building of a powerful multi-racial peoples' movement. Racism finds its real-life expression in the cold-blooded murder of the Trayvon Martins of our nation. Since 9/11 and the election of President Obama, racist rhetoric and outright violence have escalated."

He also addressed the issue of racial profiling, which, he noted, "takes many forms - on the street level (like Trayvon), in counter-terrorism matters, and against undocumented youth. And for every case that makes the news, tens of thousands do not."

And regarding how the youth feel about all this - and furthermore, about the economic times?

"There is no room for cynicism," Lopez stressed, "if we expect to win against Republicans who are exhibiting fascist tendencies. The defeat



of Obama would be a dangerous setback on every front of struggle, especially against racism and for equality for women. It would show that white people were not ready for an African American president, after all."

"This election must become a united crusade for truth, workers' rights, human rights, and justice," said Joelle Fishman, chair of the CPUSA's Political Action Commission. "It must raise class consciousness and bring people into action."

"The senseless murder of Trayvon Martin, victim of racial profiling, tragically illuminates the deadliness of a racist extreme right-wing message carried to its logical conclusion. Now, we enter this election exhausted from three and a half years of hate speech, constant attacks on the integrity of the first African-American president, and anti-democratic laws like Stand Your Ground.

"But," she added, "We enter this election fresh to protect workers' right to organize, outlaw racial profiling, and secure both the right to vote and the fundamental right of women to health care."

"A peoples' crusade is essential to turn back the attack dogs; to show how racism and capitalism hurts everyone. We intend to start knocking on doors right away with a working-class message.

"Because," she concluded, "nothing can be taken for granted."

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New Yorkers deliver Tax Day message to 1%

By Gabe Falsetta

Several thousand New Yorkers, from all walks of life, ages and beautiful mix of complexions that make this a city worth fighting for turned out for the April 17

Tax Day call "Pay Your Fair Share."

Haseeme Shamar of 32BJ, a union of the city's doormen and building workers, was fired up.

"We're paying our fair share of taxes as workers. Corporate America needs to pay their fair share. Stop balancing all budgets on our back, that's why I'm here today," Shamar said.

The rally assembled across the street from Bank of America in Midtown Manhattan.

The ever-present police "pens" quickly filled up as people shared their thoughts, breaking out into chants against the 1%.

"Wells Fargo sucks, Wells Fargo sucks" was among the lively chants.

Citizens for Tax Justice re-released its report about the Fortune 500's federal tax payments from 2008 through 2010, adding new information for 2011. North Carolina-based Duke Energy paid a net federal tax bill of negative 3.5% for those years.

Verizon paid no federal corporate income taxes, despite billions in profits and received a one billion dollar tax break, according to the CWA Local 1101. The telecommunications behemoth still has yet to settle its contract with the union workers.

Theonie Benetts shared her feelings as an unemployed New Yorker. "It's unfair for the big the corporations to not pay their share of tax. I think that it's wrong. It's a great injustice and I want it to be corrected because America is a great country."

Demonstrators marched to the main post office, where street theater group Tax Dodgers performed, along with rappers/organizers Day Shore and Ronny Don.

Argentina: Recuperando soberanía

Por International Trade Union Confederation

Con la expropiación del 51 por ciento de las acciones de la empresa nacional Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF) en manos de la española Repsol el gobierno argentino inicia el tránsito empujado de restaurar la soberanía energética.

¿Por qué ha debido considerar Argentina al petróleo y al gas como recursos estratégicos de interés nacional?

Porque el desarrollo de un país está vinculado con la disponibilidad y producción de energía para su sector productivo. Se necesita energía abundante y sin interrupción para sostener ritmos de crecimiento acelerados. A la vez, esa energía debe ser comercializada a costos que permitan a las actividades ser competitivas, local e internacionalmente. Para alcanzar ese objetivo en el caso argentino es fundamental el autoabastecimiento.

Recordemos que YPF, creada en 1922, durante el gobierno de Hipólito Yrigoyen, con yacimientos descubiertos a partir de 1907, fue conducida inicialmente para brindar una base para la industrialización e independencia económica y dando empleo a muchos argentinos.

Pero aquella YPF comenzada por Yrigoyen ya no existía en 2006. Había sido privatizada durante el gobierno de Carlos Menem entre 1990 y 1992, tras haber despedido a casi 35 mil de sus trabajadores, remató YPF en una operación irregular y a un precio muy por debajo de su valor. Y en enero de 1999 la sociedad anónima ya había quedado bajo el control mayoritario de la española Repsol.

Repsol-YPF pasó a poseer un considerable poder de mercado. Su

filial YPF controla 52 por ciento de la capacidad de refinamiento del país y dispone de una red de mil 600 estaciones de servicio.

El comportamiento observado por las empresas privadas energéticas en Argentina, a partir de la desregulación y privatización de los hidrocarburos, ha sido privilegiar la maximización de ganancias en el corto plazo y la remisión de las utilidades al exterior.

Con Repsol-YPF se reemplazaba la lógica del interés nacional por el de la ganancia empresarial. La producción se destinaba esencialmente a la exportación, a fin de aprovechar el vertiginoso alza del precio del crudo, mientras se dejaba de lado la constitución de reservas indispensables para el futuro. Al mismo tiempo se disminuía la exploración de riesgo y se reducía en forma considerable la cantidad de años que aquellas reservas podían cubrir.

La presidenta Cristina Fernández de Kirchner afirmó que de "proseguir con esta política de vaciamiento, de no producción, de no exploración, prácticamente nos tornaríamos en un país inviable, por políticas empresariales y no por recursos, ya que somos el 3er. país en el mundo luego de China y EEUU en tener gas".

Uno de los reproches es que Repsol-YPF "redujo entre 30 y 35 por ciento su producción de crudo en los últimos años y más de 40 por ciento la de gas", lo que forzó a Argentina a aumentar a más de 9 mil millones de dólares las importaciones de hidrocarburos.

Repsol-YPF se transformó, por decisión propia, en una traba al desarrollo nacional.