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Debt-ceiling disaster postponed - but not for long

By John Case

Many details of the debt ceiling deal negotiated between congressional leaders and President Obama are not yet known. It's not yet known if the deal will pass both the House and the Senate. However, the reported outlines indicate that the president and Democrats were successful in defeating Republican proposals to tie the whole country up in chaos re-debating raising the debt ceiling continuously through the 2012 election. Thanks in large part to the stiff backbone of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Social Security remains untouched. The threat of economic catastrophe from a default on U.S. debt and other obligations was averted, but it is not clear if the perilous political gridlock - and growing U.S. instability - surrounding this entire charade will still result in a downgrade of U.S. Treasury securities.

The budget cuts reportedly included in the deal appear to be, thankfully, heavily weighted towards cuts in the military as wars in Afghanistan and Iraq "draw down." This is a sign that the economic crisis has finally helped force a long overdue retrenchment in the U.S. global military profile.

But there are many other as yet unspecified cuts that will result in thousands more layoffs from federal, state and local public services for working people.



One that has been specified: There will be cuts in Medicare, although the details are not available. African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, the working poor, women and youth, seniors, all public workers and those they serve will be hit particularly hard. The recent Pew Research Foundation report on racial and ethnic inequality shows that, since the onset of the depression, minorities, for example, have virtually NO wealth with which to protect themselves against a medical or any other calamity. Instead of cuts in Medicare, the path forward is Medicare for ALL.

Further, the bill establishes "commissions"

T H I S W E E K :

- Debt-ceiling disaster postponed - but not for long
- Editorial: Tea party took America hostage on debt
- NAACP rallies for grocery workers, labor rights
- Texans soak up union culture
- Votan republicanos por quitar fondos a la OEA

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and "triggers" to force trillions more in cuts and layoffs down the road. Imminent disaster has been averted, but we must conclude that auster-

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ity politics and economics - the idea that one can fix recessions or depressions by laying off more people - have won the day. Working people will lose more ground. The rich will pay nothing towards the debt.

The showdown over the debt ceiling has proven one thing beyond doubt: The Republicans and their rich friends care nothing about debt. Their speeches and harangues on debt are lies through and through. They care only about THEIR taxes. Actually, they have one additional, overriding concern: to divert absolutely as much public capital as possible to private use.

Democratic government is the only real means working people have to contend with the power of wealth and the giant corporations. Only government has the power to redistribute wealth from these forces in accord with any principle of fairness or justice. The Republican goal: Destroy this power, make public services and investments so small they can, in the words of the scoundrel Grover Norquist, "be drowned in their bathwater."

Recent economic reports show the economy is either a) sliding into another recession - the "double dip" - or b) entering a decades-long era of stagnation and permanent high unemployment,

declining incomes for workers, and expanding inequality. Nothing in the debt-ceiling deal will do anything about this. More jobs will be lost as a result, not gained.

It is no doubt true that a Democratic president and Senate prevented a much worse outcome than the current deal. I had nearly 20 years' experience in the labor movement which proved to me it's hard to judge from the outside what is really possible, and what is not, in such bargaining. The balance of forces is hard to evaluate if you are not at the table. Maybe the president gave too much, maybe this is the best outcome possible to avert disaster for now. But the point is: We the people are not at the table.

An old trade union mentor in West Coast longshore once told me: "When the working class sneezes in unison, the temples of Wall Street tremble!"

We have our work cut out for us as we enter the 2012 election, the most momentous election since 1936. The multitudes must speak for themselves to defeat war and austerity, to turn around toward peace, and prosperity.



John Case contributes to the People's World.

Tea party took America hostage on debt

By PW Editorial Board

The debt deal's slashing of vital government programs are a dagger in the back of an economy already slipping back toward recession. Any sigh of relief will be tempered with disgust, and disgust towards government is exactly what the tea party wants.

The debt ceiling crisis is the latest in a series of hostage crises, as Republicans threaten economic sabotage by refusing to allow necessary government functions that are essential to people's welfare and the entire economy.

They do not really care about the deficit or the vast majority of people in our country. They will not be satisfied until all restraint has been lifted on corporate greed, and government has been reduced to a protector of the rich and an instrument for them to loot what public wealth remains. Republicans are willing to sabotage the entire economy in their effort to discredit the Obama presidency, retake the White House in 2012, and impose their extreme, anti-working-class agenda.

The whole program of cuts is based on the big lie that working people, especially the low-

paid, women and people of color, caused the deficit because they are living "high on the hog" with government programs.

One may be legitimately angry, as we are, at ground ceded by the president and Democrats, but to equate them with the Republicans, or, worse still, to ignore the role of the Republicans and focus only on the Democrats demobilizes and divides the broadest possible coalition necessary to fight the cuts.

The eleventh hour rally by the American people, at the urging of the president, seemed to have taken some of the worst measures off the table.

In the meantime, just as the American people began to understand and act in this crisis, it must continue to shift the debate back to where it must be: focused on jobs. To fund investments in jobs and guarantee that working-class Americans are able to live a decent life, a key ingredient is increasing government revenues - by taxing the billionaires.

That's what this debate has to pivot towards in order to defeat the hostage-takers in 2012.

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NAACP rallies for grocery workers, labor rights

By Ismael Parra and Luis Rivas

Hundreds of delegates to the NAACP's 102nd convention marched July 27 through the streets of downtown Los Angeles in support of the United Food and Commercial Workers union, which is in negotiations with Vons, Ralph's and Albertson's supermarket companies.

The union represents 62,000 grocery workers who were asked to give up half their salaries to pay for health benefits. Maria Elena Durazo, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor secretary treasurer, spoke at the rally after the march, thanking the NAACP delegates and leaders for their support of labor and pointing out that these companies had made \$5 billion in profit in 2009.

Durazo continued, saying it was necessary to make the fight a national stand against corporations operating in the ghettos. Noting that people talk of "food deserts" in poor neighborhoods, she said the term is a misnomer: Deserts are natural, but these neighborhoods have been made barren by corporations who have pulled out.

Councilmember Herb J. Wesson Jr. spoke directly in front of the Ralph's to the diverse crowd.

"When I was 17 years old, I got my very first job. And it was for a Kroger operation back in Cleveland, Ohio. I made about a buck seventy-five an hour. And I was so excited about how much my paycheck was gonna be that I spent my money before I got it. I figured, well, I'm gonna get a check of a hundred-something dollars and I was gonna buy hats, pants and shoes. So I get my check and I saw that there was a deduction for union dues. So I got pissed off!" Wesson said.

He continued, "I went home and talked to my father who worked all his life at the Chevrolet [plant], [and I] explained to him how upset I was ... But he took the time to explain to me the importance of unions. He took the time to talk to



me about a fraternity and a sorority that worked to ensure that there are good, middle class jobs."

After Wesson spoke, a UFCW organizer called forward a young Ralph's worker to speak.

"We're back at the table again where we all were seven years ago," he said. "I was one of those people that just started working for Ralphs, been there about two years. During the lockout, the strike, we were thrown out on the street. During that time I had a son born. He was born with a heart murmur."

"Needless to say, till this day, my community has still not recovered from that. We're still paying the bills. Two days ago someone called, told me, 'Hey, we need some money.' Quit asking me for money I don't have. We work five to six days a week and we work hard. And to hear that these corporations - all three of them - Ralphs, Vons and Albertson's, in order for us to keep our medical coverage, they want half our checks - half of it," he said.

At the end of the rally, several demonstrators and UFCW and NAACP members danced as organizers aptly played "Respect" by Aretha Franklin.

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Texans soak up union culture

By Jim Lane

North Texas Jobs with Justice and UAW Local 848 co-sponsored a "Union Song Revival" in Grand Prairie July 24. Old and new union songs, poetry and information were presented to a group of about 50 people from all over the area.

Many of the participants may have begun like songwriter Jack Hardy, whose song "I Ought to Know" was sung by Lisa Markley early in the program. It includes these lyrics:

I ought to know the songs of Joe Hill/I ought to know Trotsky, Marx and Hegel/I ought to know about the Haymarket hangings/And the HUAC/This I ought to know/But I don't.

By the time the two-hour program was over, people knew and appreciated a lot more about the progressive history of unions and the common people of America.

Dean Reklaw sang his great parody, "Unemployment" to the tune of "Poison Ivy." His "Bring Back the WPA" was listed in the program, but he sang "Mister Boehner, Where Are the Jobs?" to the tune of "Mister Sandman." It was particularly appropriate in light of a national call for public actions August 8 on the slogan, "Where are the Jobs?" Here is the last verse:

Mister Boehner, where are the jobs?/Don't tell us jokes, you're no Calvin and Hobbes/We live on junk food; it's all empty calories/Who needs a tax cut when we have no salaries?/Johnny, we won't harass/If you're not serious, you're out on your ass/Don't make us form angry mobs, Mister Boehner/Tell us, please please tell us, Mister Boehner, where are the jobs?

The program included traditional union songs such as "Which Side Are You On" by Florence Reese and "I'm a Union Card," on a CD published by the Smithsonian, sung by its author, Kenny Winfree. The great union standup singalong "Solidarity Forever" ended the program to a great ovation.

Votan congresistas republicanos por quitar fondos a la OEA

Por Emile Schepers

La mayoría republicana en la Cámara Baja acaba de votar por 22 a 20, en un voto estrictamente partidario, a cancelar el pago de la cuota anual de la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA).

El congresista republicano por Florida David Rivera hasta caracterizaba a la OEA como "enemigo" de Estados Unidos. Los políticos republicanos pintaban a la OEA como una organización bajo el dominio de estados izquierdistas como Cuba y Venezuela.

Pero, ¿qué es la situación real?

La OEA fue fundada bajo ese nombre en 1948 a la instigación de EEUU con la meta abiertamente declarada de parar a la "expansión del comunismo" en América Latina. En sus 63 años de existencia, la OEA ha, en gran parte, dado caso omiso a abusos brutales del poder y violaciones a los derechos humanos y democráticos por todo el hemisferio. En gran parte, la OEA se ha visto por los cubanos y por la izquierda latinoamericana como un instrumento del imperialismo.

Sin embargo, en años recientes la llegada al poder de gobiernos de izquierda y centroizquierda en muchos países de la región ha significado que EEUU no siempre ha logrado imponer su voluntad. Por ejemplo, la OEA votó por recortar el apoyo económico a Honduras luego del golpe de estado en 2009, pero el Departamento de Estado norteamericano no cumplió completamente con esto, y además comenzaba un proceso separado, aparte de la estructura de la OEA, para

"mediar" a la disputa hondureña.

Por esa razón entre otras, 39 estados latinoamericanos y caribeños han estado celebrando reuniones en los últimos años para comenzar una nueva organización cuyo propósito es el de resistir los esfuerzos norteamericanos por controlar la región. La organización, la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y del Caribe (CELAC) excluye explícitamente a EEUU y Canadá de su membresía, basado sobre malas memorias de la OEA.

La iniciación de la CELAC fue anunciado el 23 de febrero de 2010. El 5 de julio del presente año, CELAC iba ser lanzada oficialmente con una ceremonia en Venezuela. Pero la enfermedad del presidente Chávez causaba una suspensión del evento.

Los Demócratas en el Congreso de EEUU reaccionaban airadamente a la maniobra republicana por quitar fondos a la OEA como una nueva forma de aislacionismo y apuntan a la ayuda que proporciona la OEA al proceso electoral de este año en Haití.

Sin embargo, opinan muchos que aun esto es una ayuda dudosa, ya que en las elecciones quedaban excluidos por razones técnicas las candidaturas de cualquier representante del partido de mayor popularidad en Haití, el "Fanmi Lavalas" del expresidentes Jean-Bertrand Aristide, y que la injerencia de la OEA llevó a la selección del candidato más ultraderechista en las elecciones haitianas, Mickey Martelly, que tiene lazos con la ex dictadura de los Duvalier.

La medida republicana también recorta gran parte de la ayuda norteamericana a Pakistán.

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