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Protests call for “Robin Hood” tax to fund jobs, education

By John Bachtell

Chanting “Whose money? Our money!” a group of Chicago residents marched on Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s office Feb. 8 demanding lavish corporate subsidies instead be used to fund jobs creation, schools, libraries and clinics.

Speaking at the protest, Charles Brown, a leader of Action Now, stated, “We’re here to reclaim our money and demand that Mayor Emanuel put it towards jobs creation. Fund our libraries, clinics and schools so we won’t have to lay off people.”

Protesters delivered a \$33 million “check” representing Tax Increment Financing (TIF) monies returned to the city from the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, CNA and Bank of America. The CME apparently didn’t need the money after getting a huge tax break from the state and neither CNA and Bank of America could prove they had created jobs as promised.

CME is the world’s largest futures trading market and reported profits of \$745 million in 2011, up from \$196 million in 2010. CME boosted its dividend to shareholders by 20%.

But CME cried poverty and threatened to leave Illinois if they didn’t get a break. With a gun to its head, the state legislature awarded them an \$85 million tax break.



Each year hundreds of millions of dollars in TIF funds are siphoned off from revenues meant to fund education and city parks. The money instead ends up in the pockets of developers and some of the largest corporations in the city, especially to use in developing the downtown financial district.

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Included in the total of TIF funds returned was \$15 million CME had planned to use to refurbish company bathrooms and build a fitness cen-

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ter. Last week the Grassroots Collaborative coalition delivered a “golden toilet” to the CME lobby to shame the options trading firm. They retrieved

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the toilet and delivered it to Emanuel along with the check.

Lois Nelson, who taught in the Chicago Public Schools for 40 years, is upset by what she sees happening to public education.

"We not only have disadvantaged children, we have disadvantaged public schools," Nelson told a Feb. 3 rally of unemployed teachers and other workers. "Our classes are overcrowded and teachers are being laid off. That money needs to go back into our schools."

Joe Persky of the Chicago Political Economy Group (CPEG) explained the ongoing jobs crisis this way: "Only 58.3% of the population is working now. Two million jobs created in 2011 is good, but at this rate it will take us 50 years to get back to where we were in 2007."

From Mayor Emanuel's office, the teachers, trade unionists and community activists then marched on CME to demand a stock transaction tax of \$1 on each trade to create jobs and fund education. It is also referred to it as the "Robin Hood" tax.

The millions of trades that take place each day would raise an estimated \$6 billion in revenues in

Illinois according to the CPEG.

"People are hanging onto these old theories that the free market should have free rein," said DePaul University professor Paul Buchheit, who works with the Move the Money campaign. "The CME Group handles about three billion annual contracts worth well over \$1 quadrillion. One-thousandth of 1 percent of that would pay off the total budget deficit of Illinois. It's just an unbelievable fact that people don't realize."

The CME and Chicago Board Options Exchange (CBOE) reported huge profits last year.

"We are being treated like garbage," said Lourdes Guerro repeatedly as she recounted how teachers and other public workers were being thrown out of work.

"The biggest losers are the students who don't have quality, experienced teachers because no one will come up with the money," she said. "But there is a solution. We are here to demand corporate America pay its fair share."



John Bachtell is chair of the PW Illinois bureau.

Birth control is not attack on religion

By PW Editorial Board

The Obama administration made the right move when it mandated that all employers be required to offer free family planning services to women through their insurance plans.

Because religious-based employers are included, it amounts to an infringement on the separation of church and state, claim top Catholic officials and religious conservatives.

They are wrong.

These rules do not apply to churches, or any religious group serving and employing primarily its own members. The rules only apply to religious-run organizations that serve and employ people of different faiths or of no faith, such as colleges and other large institutions.

The real question is: Are religious-run organizations allowed to impose their beliefs on their workers, regardless of the workers' own beliefs?

Why should a secretary, working at a Catholic college, be denied the same right to free contraceptives as her counterpart at a secular institution? If a religious organization has enough money to run a mega-institution, should it be allowed to invalidate the rights of its workers?

This isn't a case of the federal government encroaching religious rights; it is an example of

the federal government allowing people to make their own choices on family planning. Mitt Romney and other Republicans must want the government to collude with religious groups and control individual freedom!

It also seems contradictory when religious-run institutions accept government funding, but reject the government's authority to enforce laws equally. Plus, one would think the critics, who also happen to be foes of abortion, would want health insurance that covers birth control. Birth control reduces abortions!

Despite pious pronouncements, the flock, at least on the issue of contraception, aren't following the earthly shepherds.

A recent poll shows that 55 percent of Americans support requiring employers to provide contraception; there is less support - 49 percent - for the religious institution mandate. Yet, among Catholics, 58 percent support for the employer mandate and 52 percent support the inclusion of religious institutions in the mandate.

Some who are in President Obama's corner fear a blowback, yet the administration stands with the millions of Americans who want to see religious freedom, common sense decisions, and equality under the law.

Mitt Romney and other Republicans must want the government to collude with religious groups and control individual freedom.

The 99% rally outside DC gathering of the 1%

By James Baldrige

More than 1,200 labor and community activists, as estimated by the AFL-CIO, turned out in force at a boisterous rally Friday outside the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). A many as 700 shut down Woodley Road at mid-day with an impromptu sit-in and a brief takeover of the driveway at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel.

Shouting "Whose America? Our America!" chanters and picket signs drew attention to the income gap between the "one percent" and the "99 percent" and the need for an economy that works for everyone.

Buses came from Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York City to join with DC and Virginia protesters at the 2012 version of the annual CPAC conference, the "birthing ground" of the most aggressive agenda items that will be used by the right wing in the run-up to the November elections.

Well appointed CPAC members rushed through the huge crowds that had turned the area around the hotel into a multi-racial, multi-generational festival that featured everything from Occupy Wall Street tents to neatly uniformed "Tax Dodgers," with a giant "Mitt."

At least 12 major unions participated. They were joined by groups like Occupy Baltimore, Occupy DC, Veterans for Peace and Fight For Philly. The latter is a coalition of labor, community, faith and activist groups. There was also a large contingent of immigrant rights activists.

Other signs in the march and protest were "Medicare Is Sexy," "Banks got bailouts, Schools got sold out," "Santorum is a dirty word" (carried by an Occupy Baltimore leader), "Jobs not cuts," "They pay less taxes than you and I," "Occupy the future," "Recall Walker," "Corporations are NOT people," "Immigration reform NOW," "Ban fracking now" and "We are the Times Persons of the Year."



The United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 1994, kicked off the night demonstration by parading their "golden throne" - a gold-painted toilet - in front of the Marriot Wardman, "representing Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's greed and arrogance," Local President Gino Renne said.

Peter Brimelow, a prominent white nationalist and founder of the racist and anti-Semitic website VDARE attended this year and "birther" leader Joseph Farah was another right-wing luminary in attendance.

Youth for Western Civilization, whose founder was arrested in 2007 for karate chopping an African American woman on the street while calling her "n****" was accepted this year as a CPAC co-sponsor.

GOP presidential candidates Romney, Gingrich and Santorum were there.

Unions at the demonstrations against the right-wing cabal included the Sheetmetal Workers, Elevator Constructors, Local, the Service Employees International Union, the American Federation of Teachers, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the Firefighters, the American Federation of Government Employees, Stagehands and Actors, the Ironworkers, the Communications Workers of America and the DC Metro Council of the AFL-CIO.

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Oakland okays army base project

By Marilyn Bechtel

A new chapter opened Feb. 7 in the long saga of efforts to redevelop the former Oakland Army Base, as the City Council approved guiding principles to assure Oakland residents priority for construction jobs and for the warehouse and goods movement jobs that are to follow.

The base is especially important to the city's economic life because it is next to the Port of Oakland, the nation's fifth busiest port, in a working-class area where unemployment is high.

Agreement on the provisions came after years of discussion, and a nine-month process that brought together labor, community members, environmentalists and the business community, with Councilmember Jane Brunner playing a major role. Participating in the discussions was the 30-organization Revive Oakland! coalition of clergy, workers, youth, and neighbors from West and East Oakland.

Besides construction jobs, the project is expected to create some 2,500 to 3,000 permanent jobs.

Among the agreed goals: Fifty percent of work hours are to go to Oakland residents, with first priority to residents in West Oakland and other areas of high unemployment. All new apprentices are to be Oakland residents, and a quarter of apprenticeships and later operations jobs are to go to disadvantaged (low income, formerly incarcerated, etc.) workers. Workers are to have the right to organize, free of employer interference.

"Maybe this will help to stop some of the crime in Oakland," said longtime West Oakland resident Shirley Burnell. "People would have jobs and would be able to support themselves and their families and they won't be on the streets robbing people."

Meanwhile, the city and the developers are working to complete their negotiations in the coming months.

Comenzó en Nicaragua masivo curso escolar con acceso gratuito

Por Prensa Latina

Nicaragua comenzó hoy un nuevo curso escolar para más de un millón 600 mil niños y jóvenes desde las enseñanzas de preescolar hasta secundaria, con la aspiración de incrementar rendimiento y retención en los planteles.

Las matrículas en los centros públicos se extenderán hasta finales del próximo mes, para asegurar la mayor incorporación posible, precisó a la prensa el viceministro de Educación José Treminio.

Añadió que en zonas rurales emplearán horarios flexibles en los colegios con el propósito de que los padres pueden llevar a sus hijos sin entorpecer faenas agrícolas realizadas en las primeras horas del día.

Educación, precisó, empleará un programa de nivelación especial para los alumnos que entren un poco más tarde a clases.

"Hemos venido trabajando para crear todas las condiciones con vistas al inicio del año lectivo" aseguró Treminio, quien apreció entre los preparativos el arreglo y construcción de inmuebles, así como la distribución de libros y materiales didácticos.

Significó asimismo la entrega también gratuita de 250 mil mochilas con sus útiles escolares y 200 mil pares de zapatos.

Esos módulos están orientados fundamentalmente al área rural donde "las familias necesitan del acompañamiento solidario de nuestro gobierno, para garantizar que sus niños puedan incorporarse a las aulas", subrayó.

Similar garantía tendrá la merienda para más de un millón de ni-

ños y niñas de preescolar y primaria, equivalentes a más del 94 por ciento de la matrícula, indicó.

En este caso, precisó, se trata de menores inscritos en centros comunitarios, públicos y subvencionados, en las escuelas públicas y subvencionadas en la totalidad de los departamentos.

La primera entrega de alimentos para la merienda ascendió a 23 mil toneladas, anunció el funcionario, quien notificó, además, el propósito de invertir en 2012 más de 600 millones de córdobas (casi 27 millones de dólares) en la reparación de los planteles.

En 2011, recordó, recibieron mantenimiento y rehabilitación más de mil 200 centros de estudio y alrededor seis mil ambientes educativos, lo cual incluyó aulas, bibliotecas y áreas para la práctica de ejercicios físicos.

Para este año las metas en Educación Preescolar es llegar a 238 mil 559 estudiantes matriculados, para una tasa bruta de escolarización del 59 por ciento, y lograr un 92 por ciento de retención, señala una evaluación del ministerio de Educación.

En el caso de Primaria, entre los objetivos se halla la inserción de 930 mil alumnos, con aspiración de conseguir una retención del 92 por ciento y tasa de terminación de estudios de 78 puntos porcentuales.

Triminio inscribió la atención al sistema de enseñanza dentro de las políticas de justicia social y de restitución de derechos humanos que impulsa el gobierno, encabezado por el Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional.