

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## Third World Mississippi shows failure of conservative policies

By Ryan C. Ebersole



**R**epublicans say conservative remedies, will solve the nation's health care and economic disparities. But, evidence from Mississippi suggests otherwise.

Mississippi is, by many metrics, an extremely conservative state. In fact, according to Gallup, it is the most conservative state in the union. The state is controlled by the GO, with a very regressive income tax and one of the lowest tax burdens.

The state ranks dead last economically, with the lowest per capita income in the country - \$30,399. Compare that to the national per capita income of \$40,208. 21.9 percent of Mississippi residents live below the poverty level, and 10.9 percent were unemployed - worse than national rates of 14 percent and 9 percent respectively.

As the poorest region of the poorest state, the Mississippi Delta illustrates the huge income disparity in the world's richest nation. The Delta is a rural region composed of 17 agricultural counties in the alluvial flood plain of the Mississippi River. The region is historically considered to be one of the most economically and educationally deprived areas of the nation. 20 percent of the region's population is on food stamps.

The economic problems of the region have been endemic for quite some time. Even back between 2006 and 2008, while the nation had a 6.8 percent unemployment rate, the Delta held at 12

percent unemployment.

Susan Mayfield-Johnson, Ph.D., is the director of the Center for Sustainable Health Outreach at the University of Southern Mississippi, which researches community health in rural Mississippi. Dr. Mayfield-Johnson states that the lack of a viable non-agriculture-based economy in the region has resulted in "stagnant incomes and low-skilled jobs for decades."

The region also experiences significant barriers in education. Only 61.6 percent of adults in the region have a high school diploma, compared to 80.4 percent nationwide. Adults in Mississippi

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have the highest rate of low literacy in the nation.

Mississippi also leads the nation in a number of health care problems. It has the highest rate of

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heart disease and the second highest rate of diabetes in the country, increasing 70 percent between 1994 and 2006. A third of Mississippians suffer from hypertension.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death among adults in Mississippi, 33.6 percent higher than in the U.S. as a whole. In the Delta region it is an astonishing 83.5 percent higher.

The five U.S. counties with the lowest life expectancies for women are in the Mississippi Delta, lower than the nations of Honduras, Peru or El Salvador.

The five counties with the lowest life expectancies for men are also in Mississippi, four in the Delta. Life expectancies for men in these counties are all under 69 years, lower than countries like Brazil or Latvia.

The lack of health care access in the Mississippi Delta is even more staggering and may be a major factor in the health disparities seen in the state.

Of the 5,000-plus physicians licensed in the state, only 584 are listed in the 17 Delta counties.

There are only 16 diabetes and metabolic specialists, only one in the 17-county. Of the 12

ophthalmologists in the Delta, only one accepts Medicaid.

21 hospitals service the region, mostly small, under 20 beds, and limited in the services they deliver. Three Delta counties have no hospital.

Gov. Haley Barbour's resistance to President Obama's health care reform adds to the region's woes. Barbour has claimed, "There's nobody in Mississippi who does not have access to health care," and has been making the problem worse since he took office in January 2004.

Mississippi cut its Medicaid rolls between 2004 and 2008, has also taken to cutting the health care safety net and reduced the coverage for 65,000 citizens who qualified for a Poverty-Level Aged and Disability program.

Mississippi, dominated by conservative politicians, has health care, income and economic disparities that embody the worst of the nation's ills. And the Delta is the most extreme example. Overall, conservatism doesn't seem to be translating into positive results for the Hospitality State.



**Ryan C. Ebersole writes for the People's World.**

## Real peace and fake doves

By PW Editorial Board

**P**resident Obama charted a course to end the U.S. combat role in Afghanistan over the next three years, with a hand-over of security responsibilities to the Afghan people "complete by 2014."

He rejected a push sections of his administration for a slower pullout, an important step in the right direction.

But the pace he has announced, in line with his earlier pledges, is cautious indeed, and there will be ongoing pressures to stop or slow even this withdrawal plan. There and in Iraq, public pressure will be essential to ensure that all the troops are brought home, including special forces and the like, and that the mammoth U.S. military bases in those countries are shut down.

Meanwhile, with their eyes on 2012, Republicans - the military industrial complex's best friends - are trying to position themselves as peaceniks.

But these Republican wolves in doves' clothing are silent about a key point President Obama addressed in his speech: "Over the last decade, we have spent a trillion dollars on war, at a time

of rising debt and hard economic times. Now, we must invest in America's greatest resource - our people."

He spoke of the need to "unleash innovation that creates new jobs and industries" and to "re-build our infrastructure and find new and clean sources of energy."

American taxpayers are spending \$120 billion on the Afghanistan war just for this year.

The nation's mayors called for bringing the Afghanistan and Iraq war dollars "home to meet vital human needs, promote job creation, rebuild our infrastructure, aid municipal and state governments, and develop a new economy based upon renewable, sustainable energy and reduce the federal debt."

Will the Republican sudden converts to peace sign on to that?

Most Americans will, if we get the word out. Share this article with others, talk to your neighbor, your co-worker, friends and family, contact your senators and representative, join a group, get involved, build the movement.

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# From Maine to Cuba, travelers with a purpose

Special to the World

People in Norway, Maine, will be giving a July 1 send-off to three Mainers heading off to Cuba next week. Under the auspices of the Maine group Let Cuba Live and Pastors for Peace, they are taking humanitarian supplies donated from Maine and Quebec.

Two days later another send-off will be held July 3 in the coastal town of Brunswick. Honored guests at the event will be Maria Cron from Portland and her two daughters Heather and Crystal. They will be joining others from throughout the United States traveling to Cuba with the Pastors for Peace Friendship Caravan. They will be traveling across the U.S. along several routes aboard trucks and buses to be given to Cuba filled with donated aid material.

Celebrations and send-off events are taking place around the country. For a list, see the Pastors for Peace website.

At the Brunswick event, boxes from Maine and Quebec will be loaded on vehicles for delivery to a converted bus that is heading south to a rendezvous in McAllen, Texas, en route to Cuba.

The three Maine travelers eventually will arrive in Tampico, Mexico, where they will help put the supplies into a Cuban ship and go on to Cuba for a week of educational and solidarity activities.

Let Cuba Live has supported the caravans ever since they began in 1992. In sending donated humanitarian supplies to the island, the national faith-based organization Pastors for Peace, together with caravan participants, protests the U.S. Cuban economic blockade, in effect now for half a century. Those involved see that policy as immoral and illegal. The Friendship Caravans, joined each year by well over 100 supporters, travel to Cuba in the tradition of non-violent civil disobedience. "You don't need to ask permission to help out a neighbor," Pastors for Peace founder Rev.



Lucius Walker once remarked.

Crystal Cron, who recently graduated from Suffolk University in Boston, says she is also going to Cuba in part to learn about possibly studying at the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana. Presently 125 U.S. students are receiving a free medical education there. Every year, 1,500 new doctors from over 30 countries graduate from the school, established in 1998.

Tom Whitney, local organizer for Let Cuba Live, says the Friday, July 1, event at Christ Church in Norway, Me., is a good way to usher in the holiday weekend. Those on hand for the 6 p.m. celebration will be served a Cuban/Peruvian meal and, significantly, says Whitney, Maria Cron's highly acclaimed flan.

The Sunday, July 3, Brunswick send-off is set for 2-4 p.m. at the "Gazebo" on Maine Street.

At both events there will be an opportunity to make donations to help with the travelers' expenses and costs of sending aid material.

For information about Pastors for Peace and the Caravans, go to [www.pastorsforpeace.org](http://www.pastorsforpeace.org). For more information about the Maine events or Let Cuba Live, call (207) 443-2899.

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## “Winkler County nurses” win another victory

By Vivian Weinstein

The American Nurses Association hailed a new victory for two whistle-blower nurses from Winkler County, Texas - Vicki Galle and Anne Mitchell - with the conviction this week of County Sheriff Robert Roberts.

This case became known nationally after the two long-time registered nurses at Winkler County Hospital in Kermit, Texas, reported to the Texas Medical Board in 2009 about serious misconduct, substandard care and an inappropriate business partnership between Sheriff Robert Roberts and a hospital physician, Dr. Rolando Arafiles Jr.

Normally after such a report an investigation takes place and the complainants' names are kept confidential. However in this case, the sheriff used his position to confiscate the nurses' computers, finding their letter to the medical board. The hospital then fired the nurses, whose names were now public, and the nurses were charged with “official misuse of information,” which could have resulted in 10 years of imprisonment and fines.

At the nurses' trial in 2010 the charges against Galle were dropped and Mitchell was acquitted. Subsequently charges were filed against Dr. Arafiles, Sheriff Roberts, County Attorney Scott Tidwell, and the Winkler County Hospital.

On June 14, Roberts was convicted. He was sentenced to four years of felony probation, 100 days in jail and a \$6,000 fine. He must surrender his “peace officer” license. The hospital has already been fined \$15,850 for improper supervision.

Protection of nurses and reporting laws are widely seen as of great importance for both nurses and patient safety.

The Winkler County nurses have been out of work since the beginning of the case in 2009.

## Premio a las trabajadoras domésticas

Por Alberto Ampuero

La Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT) adoptó un convenio para mejorar las condiciones de decenas de millones de trabajadores domésticos alrededor del mundo, que son a menudo inmigrantes.

Dicha normativa, que se llamará Convención 189, constituye el primer instrumento jurídico internacional que protege a este sector informal.

El texto aprobado garantizará un tratamiento similar al que tienen ya otras categorías de empleados y exigirá a los gobiernos que verifiquen que los trabajadores domésticos comprenden las condiciones de sus contratos. Se propone asimismo instaurar un día de descanso semanal e impedir que los patrones obliguen a sus empleados domésticos a permanecer en el lugar de trabajo durante sus días libres.

Similares a la ley que aprobó Nueva York el 1º de julio de 2010, la “Ley de Derechos de las Trabajadoras Domésticas”, que garantiza el pago de horas extras después de 40 horas de trabajo semanal o de 44 horas si la empleada vive en el hogar, un día de descanso cada siete días o el pago de ese tiempo si ésta lo prefiere y tres días de vacaciones anuales después de trabajar para la misma familia después de un año.

También le garantiza los beneficios de compensación por discapacidad, al igual que otros trabajadores en el estado y el derecho a iniciar una acción legal si son víctima de hostigamiento o racismo en su lugar de empleo, entre otros beneficios.

La aprobación de esta primera ley laboral específica para los servicios del hogar, que beneficia a unas 250,000 personas que han estado ex-

cluidas del código laboral, es la culminación de siete años de lucha de los activistas por los derechos de las trabajadoras domésticas.

Consultada Jill Shenker sobre cómo se controlará que se respeten en Nueva York los derechos ganados, la coordinadora de la Alianza Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar dijo que, al igual que todas las leyes laborales, deberá ser implementada por el Ministerio de Trabajo y que el Estado deberá defender esos derechos.

La ley de Nueva York terminó en el estado con una situación heredada de los años 30. Entonces, en Estados Unidos, las trabajadoras domésticas -al igual que los trabajadores rurales-, quedaron fuera de la Ley de Condiciones de Trabajo Justo.

Por lo tanto, hasta hoy, fuera del territorio neoyorquino, la trabajadora del hogar queda sujeta a la buena voluntad de sus empleadores.

Se estima que alrededor de 2.5 millones de personas trabajan en hogares en Estados Unidos, siendo la inmensa mayoría mujeres inmigrantes, una población vulnerable por su género, estatus migratorio, confinamiento en su lugar de trabajo y su bajo nivel de educación.

Según la organización de derechos humanos Human Right Watch, esto equivale a una “esclavitud moderna”, que se origina en que los empleadores no ven a su personal doméstico como un ser humano, sino “como un inmigrante que simplemente debería estar feliz de tener un trabajo”.

Las activistas creen que la explotación del personal doméstico está arraigada en la cultura. No olvidemos, dice Carmen Duarte, que el sector del trabajo doméstico hunde sus raíces en la esclavitud Africana.

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