

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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July 21, 2012

Grocery prices soar as drought intensifies

By John Wojcik

Packages containing four small stalks of corn were selling for over \$2.00 apiece last Saturday at a South Side Aldi's supermarket. And Aldi's is the place you go when you want to get things cheap.

This time last year there were ten or twelve stalks going for a dollar and even less at Aldi's and at grocery stores all over town. And just a few months ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture was projecting a record corn crop of 14.7 billion bushels.

Farmers sowed more acres than ever this year and the summer-like temperatures in March spurred many to plant corn early. But that was then.

One hundred miles south of the Aldi's supermarket last Saturday, as far as you could see in the cornfields, the plants were wilting under a blazing sun.

A little further south the farmers were getting ready to plow under countless tons of already-dead stalks. The sizzling temperatures combined with a record Midwest drought have done their damage.

Coming next is the premature mass slaughtering of animals, who will otherwise starve for lack of feed.

And the people, economists say, will suffer higher supermarket prices for everything from corn, vegetables and prepared foods to milk and meat. How high those prices will soar depends on how long the temperatures stay above normal and how long we continue to have no rain.

The only "silver lining" is that for several



weeks, beginning soon, there will be a temporary drop in the prices of items most people put on their grills.

The mass premature slaughtering of animals sold for meat, particularly cattle and pigs, will make for cheaper steaks, sausage and ribs, says Shawn Hackett of the agricultural commodities firm Hackett Financial Advisors, in Bouton Beach, Fla.

He told MSNBC's Bottomline this week that everything else, from milk to salad dressings, will cost more almost immediately and that in the long term the good meat deals will disappear as de-

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mand outstrips supply.

Even before the drought, however, consum-

Coming next is the premature mass slaughtering of animals.

ers have been reeling under food price inflation, which, according to government figures, was 4.8 percent last year and was originally predicted to be around two percent this year. “The drought means above normal food prices in 2012 going into 2013,” said Corinne Alexander, an agricultural economist at Purdue University.

As some of the prices were already going up at Aldi’s last week and as the crops in southern Illinois were being plowed under the U.S.D.A. declared more than a thousand counties in 26 states to be natural disaster areas, the largest such designation ever made in history.

“It’s like trying to farm in hell,” said Fred Below, a crop biologist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The heat waves, the droughts, and the rising prices in grocery stores is giving millions yet another chance to grasp the importance of climate change as something that goes beyond melting ice on the north pole and rising sea levels along the coasts.

In Indiana, just south of here, temperatures rose last week into the triple digits for 11 days,

reaching as high at 107 degrees. In Colorado, wildfires raged for more than three weeks. Colorado TV stations described the situation as one in which the state, itself, seemed to be on fire.

While this was going on, a “derecho,” a line of thunderstorms, developed over Chicago’s western suburbs. It crossed the city and then turned into a “super derecho” that travelled all the way to the East Coast killing at least 13 and leaving many millions without power.

As the corn burns in the fields and as the farmers and millions of others pray for rain the country also has an opportunity to actually do something about the crisis.

On Election Day this November it can deliver a resounding defeat to the Republican Party, a party that, in the face of everything that has happened, continues to place a higher priority on the authenticity of the president’s birth certificate than it does on climate change and global warming.



John Wojcik is PW labor editor.

We are at a crossroads

By PW Editorial Board

All of the organized progressive movements are on high alert. They know that they must unite and fight or face dire consequences. There is no “neutral” in this epic battle. “We stand at a crossroads.”

At the center of the cross roads is whether the right wing ruling class will be able to continue its casino capitalist policies of speculation or whether the workers and people’s priorities will be put first.

The right wing has more dough than Nabisco and it is using it to spread racism, McCarthyism, immigrant bashing, homophobia and sexism. All of this aims to confuse, demobilize, demoralize and divide the people.

It is also out to steal this election Jim Crow style. The right is afraid that if the democratic and progressive majority of voters get to the polls, it will go down to defeat.

If the ultra right is defeated at the polls new possibilities for real change will open up. Hopefully, labor and peoples movements will be able to take the offensive.

Being able to take the offensive in the struggles for jobs, health care, peace and equality are critical to the survival of the 99%.

The aim of that struggle now is to change course, improve working people’s lives and build

the unity and power of the 99% while harnessing and weakening the dominance of the 1%.

Things cannot continue as they are.

For millions of working people, racial minorities, women, youth, immigrants and seniors this is a fight for survival.

This is the worst crisis since the 1930’s. But it is happening at a more advanced stage of capitalist decline and decay and it is a worldwide crisis.

U.S. capitalism is 80 years older than it was during the Great Depression. Since then there have been many subsequent economic crises and also a structural crisis which exported much of the nation’s manufacturing base.

Since then the Wall street parasites have been given even freer reign, causing unparalleled insecurity, deprivation and poverty for working class and middle class families.

This is the mess that the capitalist class has made of this nation, a nation built by the labor if its multi-racial, multi-national working class.

Yet, as bad as things are for so many, if the Republicans win, things will get even worse.

But this battle can be won.

Yes, “We are at a crossroads,” but through a united fightback, a turning point in a good direction is possible.

If the ultra right is defeated at the polls new possibilities for real change will open up.

AFL-CIO, Change to Win, go to bat for gay marriage

By John Wojcik

The AFL-CIO and Change to Win, the nation's two largest labor federations filed a brief yesterday asking the U.S. Court of Appeals to uphold a lower court ruling that the so-called Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional.

The DOMA, which became law in 1996, bars federal benefits for same sex couples.

The independent National Education Association joined the two labor federations in the filing which says the DOMA. "by intention and design, ensures that workers with same-sex spouses earn less money, are taxed more on their wages and benefits, and have available to them fewer valuable benefits and less economic security than their counterparts with different-sex spouses."

Also yesterday, more than 130 House Democrats filed a similar brief with the Court of Appeals. The court is expected to hear the case in September.

In a 2005 statement on a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would have banned same sex marriage and denied other rights to LGBT people, the AFL-CIO's Executive Council declared that "families come in all shapes and sizes. As our families change, our union contracts also change. For more than a generation, unions have negotiated domestic partner benefits for the workers they represent, which provide crucial access to health care, family and medical leave and other benefits for our heterosexual families and seniors as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families."

The anti-gay amendment that labor battled back in 2005 had the support of right wing groups across the country. In its opposition to the amendment the AFL-CIO noted that in its 214-year history, the U.S. Constitution has been amended only 18 times to grant basic civil rights "but we never amended the Constitution to discriminate against any group of people denying them rights."

The brief makes a powerful argument against the DOMA, noting that the law is unconstitutional



because it puts workers into separate groups and allows discrimination against workers on the basis of the category into which it places them.

The brief notes that DOMA prevents or significantly restricts access to spousal health benefits by workers married to same sex partners.

The court filing by the unions also notes that DOMA denies to same-sex couples benefits provided to other married couples when a worker suffers a workplace injury, or otherwise becomes ill or infirm.

A third form of discrimination happens under DOMA, the briefing notes, because the law impinges on the ability of a whole class of workers to plan for retirement by mandating a complete denial of Social Security benefits to same-sex spouses of covered workers, and precludes same-sex spouses from receiving the benefits of tax provisions intended to incentivize savings in private retirement accounts.

A fourth big argument in the brief filed by the unions tackles the area of immigrant rights. The unions argue that DOMA forces immigration and naturalization laws to be administered differently for different classes of workers by making it more difficult for married same-sex couples who are immigrants seeking to work and remain lawfully in the United States than it does for heterosexual couples.

The DOMA, which became law in 1996, bars federal benefits for same sex couples.

Ship products not jobs, say Detroiters

By John Rummel

It was a fitting backdrop to raise the demand, "Ship products, not jobs." The still active Detroit Port on the Detroit River is where union members and city residents rallied Thursday in support of Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow's Bring the Jobs Home Act.

Metro Detroit Labor Council President Chris Michalakakis said he wanted to "see the port humming with Detroit-made products." The bill would stop giving companies tax credits to ship jobs overseas. President Obama also wants to end the Bush-era, job-killing giveaways, said Michalakakis.

Ja McMurrin, United Steelworkers District 2 Rapid Response and political coordinator, said that in the past 10 years, 50,000 factories closed and 6 million jobs were lost.

McMurrin noted that during the heyday of the 1950s, 60s, 70s, and 80s, the wages paid manufacturing workers created the consumer demand that "fed the entire economy."

It was that "real economy" based on manufacturing that opened the door to both wealth and equality for many in Detroit and throughout the country.

To those who say high wages drive companies abroad, McMurrin said companies already make profit in the U.S., "but how much is enough?"

Community organizer Kermit Haynes said getting back to work is the number one need of city residents.

Haynes said, "Higher ups don't look at it from that standpoint."

But he said that kind of thinking is shortsighted and the damage those cuts cause - such as closing recreation centers, schools, and turning people to crime - will eventually raise the debt even higher.

Éxito Conferencia en EE.UU. a favor de antiterroristas cubanos

Por Prensa Latina

Organizaciones sociales de solidaridad con Cuba radicadas en Miami, Florida, calificaron hoy como un rotundo éxito la II Conferencia de 2012 para exigir la libertad de cinco antiterroristas cubanos condenados injustamente en Estados Unidos. (RadioPL)

Más de 80 personas se reunieron este 15 de julio en el Hotel Embassy Suites, de Miami, para demostrar su compromiso con las nobles causas de Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González y René González, grupo conocido internacionalmente como los Cinco Héroes.

Los oradores fueron Max Lesnik, director de Radio Miami y dirigente de la Alianza Martiana, y Andrés Gómez, coordinador de la Brigada Antonio Maceo y director de la revista Areitodigital, indicaron los grupos solidarios en un comunicado al que tuvo acceso Prensa Latina.

La conferencia estuvo dedicada además a la vida y el trabajo por la libertad de los Cinco del abogado Roberto González (hermano de René) quien falleció recientemente en Cuba después de una larga lucha contra el cáncer.

René González fue puesto en libertad en octubre de 2011 después de haber cumplido su sanción, pero debe permanecer por tres años más bajo libertad supervisada.

El acto también sirvió de tribuna para denunciar la falta de acción federal en el esclarecimiento de la acción terrorista del pasado 27 de abril que destruyera las oficinas de la agencia de vuelos a Cuba, Airline Brokers.

Lesnik y Gómez trataron difer-

entes temas relacionados con la lucha contra el terrorismo y la campaña política internacional a favor de lograr la libertad de los Cinco.

Los oradores igualmente destacaron la entereza, valentía y patriotismo de aquellos en Miami que a través de los últimos 35 años, integrando las organizaciones que conforman la Alianza Martiana.

En el mismo contexto se informó sobre la nueva moción para modificar las condiciones de libertad supervisada de René González, con el propósito de que el tribunal le conceda poder cumplir el resto de ésta en Cuba con su familia.

La reunión fue sugerida por la Alianza Martiana, la Brigada Antonio Maceo, la Asociación José Martí, el Círculo Bolivariano de Miami y la Asociación de Mujeres Cristianas en Defensa de la Familia, entre otros grupos no gubernamentales fraternos hacia la isla antillana.

El texto de la convocatoria a la conferencia recordó que las apelaciones de los patriotas cubanos y demás documentos judiciales requeridos se encuentran en manos de la jueza, Joan Lenard, del Tribunal Federal de Distrito del Sur de la Florida.

En un juicio amañado en la ciudad de Miami, los Cinco Héroes fueron sentenciados a largas condenas de cárcel, que incluyeron cadenas perpetuas y sentencias de 19 y 15 años.

Personalidades internacionales, asociaciones civiles y representantes gubernamentales los han defendido y recuerdan que solo controlaban la actividad de grupos extremistas tratando de anticiparse a sus acciones y reuniendo pruebas sobre posibles ataques contra Cuba.