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Unions mean everything on New Orleans docks

By John Wojcik

As they operate the cranes and forklifts at this famous port, workers here say they are 100 percent behind the fight for union rights being waged by their fellow workers across the country.

David Magee, vice president of International Longshoremen's Association Local 3000, invited People's World reporters to mingle with hundreds of dockworkers as they shaped up for the day's work on the port at 6 a.m. last Saturday. They had a lot to say.

"They are attacking unions, that's plain crazy," said Denice Armsted, an African American who was the first female ILA member to come to work on the docks here 15 years ago. "If it weren't for a decent union job how would I have raised my three kids?"

"I couldn't bring up a family on a low-wage job in a tourist trap or at a fast food restaurant," she said. "And this job makes me feel like I am somebody. I drive a forklift and I match up with the best of them."

"What we do here keeps this whole country going," she added.

Armsted has a reputation as one of the best crane operators on the port.

"At first some of the men didn't think I could do the job on the docks, but now they all know that I know what I'm doing," she said.



When she went to work at the port, she said, "people in my family thought I was crazy and even now sometimes they tell me to quit. I won't. I love this work."

Armsted said that creation of good paying jobs is a critical need in the area.

"The only way to bring back New Orleans is to create thousands of union wage jobs. Rebuild the 9th (Ward) and expand the port and pay the people well and then you'll see this city really get cooking," she said.

Reginald Johnson, an African American, is a lasher - he secures containers on the large cargo

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ships that continually leave from the port here. Johnson has a wife and four children and has worked almost 20 years on the docks.

The fact that Louisiana is an open shop state is a major reason it has been so difficult to rebuild.

He came back to New Orleans within days after the Katrina evacuation and began to repair the damage to his home - several feet of water and a torn roof. He got together with some of his buddies, commandeered some boats, and spent a week rescuing people.

His 19 year-old-daughter, a medical student, lives at home. She has cancer.

"If it weren't for the union I wouldn't have the health coverage that keeps my baby alive," he said, "and keeps her healthy enough so she can have a life that means something."

Johnson said his job allows his 21-year-old son Eric, who also lives at home, to attend Tulane University here. Eric is becoming a professional photographer.

He said his 22-year-old son Jallmal studied art and his 24-year-old daughter Brandy is a fitness instructor.

"A job isn't a job," Johnson said, "unless it allows you to do something like that. The union is the reason I got my fair chance to live like a man and raise a family. We got non-union people doing on the docks for \$5 what the union guys get paid \$22 to do."

Johnson said the fact that Louisiana is an "open shop" state is a major reason it has been so difficult to rebuild after Katrina.

"When Bush was president the government came in here and gave contracts to non-union outfits. You can't rebuild if you reconstruct something and leave behind afterward people who can't afford to buy anything," he said. "It's crazy. It doesn't make any sense."

Johnson pointed out that Republican attacks on Obama are being orchestrated by the same people who oppose unions.

"They are going after President Barack because they know, deep down, he is on the side of the workers," Johnson said. Speaking of Obama's election in 2008, he said, "That election really wasn't an election. That was a movement. You had a movement like this country never saw before and we are going to have to do it again. Otherwise we are in deep trouble."



John Wojcik is the People's World labor editor.

Republicans' extortion needs a resounding "no"

By PW Editorial Board

The Republican Party, and its House leader Eric Cantor, are ready to pull the plug on the U.S. economy if they don't get their way.

If the ceiling on the debt limit isn't lifted by Aug. 2, which the Republicans are resisting so far, then the U.S. government will go into default on its financial obligations.

No one knows what the exact repercussions on the U.S. and world economy will be if the federal government goes belly up. But it is fair to say that we will be moving into uncharted and stormy waters.

People here as well as worldwide will be hurt. A double-dip recession is almost a certainty. But Cantor and his fellow Republicans don't seem to be bothered by this prospect.

From their point of view, a default that sends the economy into free fall would make it easier to impose economic "shock therapy" on the American people in the form of steep cuts in social programs and entitlements - yup, things we are entitled to because we've worked and paid for them - like Social Security.

There is only one way to describe this strategy: the work of thugs, gangsters, criminals.

Resisting their extortion demands is the only sensible course of action. Labor and its allies should continue to press the president and congressional Democrats to draw a line in the sand and say with one voice, "No deal. Sweeping cuts in entitlement programs are neither good for the economy nor warranted on their merits. Our entitlement programs may need a little tweaking, but they remain fundamentally sound."

In the longer term, the overriding task is to unceremoniously vote this Republican gang out of office in next year's elections.

Would it solve all of our problems? By no means, but it would sure help. Only on a more favorable political terrain can the working class, racially oppressed, women, youth and others hope to win, through mass struggle, the reforms necessary to address the crisis conditions - including joblessness and fiscal imbalances - brought on by a global slump.

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Budget must “respect, protect” women, coalition says

By Marilyn Bechtel

In their budget negotiations, Congress and President Obama must respect women’s contributions to the economy, protect programs especially serving and employing women, and reject plans threatening to send women into poverty, says a nonpartisan coalition of women’s organization.

At a July 12 telephone press conference, the 240-organization National Council of Womens’ Organizations launched the Respect, Protect, Reject Campaign, and called on negotiators to uphold Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and emphasize women’s concerns in the talks.

Pointing out that women have been disproportionately harmed by the recession and rely heavily on these targeted programs, the council in a July 12 letter urged budget negotiators to develop “a robust jobs program” and to acknowledge “the real causes of the federal budget deficit.”

Calling joblessness “the first reason for the deficit,” Terry O’Neill, president of the National Organization for Women, told reporters, “then our leaders must look at the real causes and do something about it.”

The inequality of wages between men and women, which is even greater for African American and Latino women, has also intensified the recession’s impact on women, said O’Neill.

U.S. Rep. Donna Edwards, D-Md., said, “When I think about my congressional district, I think about the thousands of women, particularly, for whom there is no such thing as a 401(K) or a pension or savings, and whose homes have lost value. Social security is their groceries, their day-to-day expenses. So cutting, it’s not an option.”

Edwards and 69 other Democrats in Congress have written to President Obama urging him to keep Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid off the negotiating table.



Joan Entmacher of the National Women’s Law Center supported Edwards’ words, saying, “This is the first recovery in history where women are doing so much worse than men, two years into the recovery.”

The main cause, she said, is the huge layoffs in the public sector, where women - a majority of the workforce - actually lost even more than their share of jobs. “Who are these women? They are teachers, librarians, social workers, health care workers who provide essential services to women and their families. And now these jobs are gone.”

Public works jobs programs should ensure that women, and men of color, could benefit from them, she said. And a public jobs program should also include “investments in our human infrastructure” such as education and libraries.

Older Women’s League board member Margie Metzler, herself a laid-off worker, emphasized the overwhelming importance of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid to older women.

Activists urge supporters to sign the Respect, Protect, and Reject Campaign’s petition to Congress.

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“American Dream” in Dallas

By Jim Lane

The disparate group of people from all around town who gathered in the modest Oak Cliff neighborhood were pleased from the beginning to the end of the two-hour house party called by MoveOn.org on July 17. The one thing they certainly shared was their conviction that America is going to hell in a handbasket, and, further, that they were in the process of doing something about it!

MoveOn organizers had let the house party hosts know that 1,500 such events were under way simultaneously around the country. By contrast, they said, the tea party movement launched in 2009 with house parties, but could only scrape together 900.

The topic was “Rebuild the American Dream,” but, early on, someone in my group said that it should be changed to “Building a New American Dream,” a new dream of the cessation of exploitation at home and abroad is in order.

We were asked to prioritize a list of 40 excellent ideas for improving the United States now. It was hard to do, because all 40 ideas, sent in earlier by MoveOn subscribers across the states, were outstanding.

Of course, people had a lot to say about the deficiencies of the present situation, but all of us also had a bright burnished story about hopeful developments that we had personally seen or participated in. Several agreed on having been inspired by that wonderful night in 2008 when we learned that we had elected our very hopeful president.

Although we recognized the obstacles being placed before our democracy, all of us were united in our determination to make real changes between now and November, 2012. MoveOn will be announcing the broad survey results soon.

Texas viola tratado, ejecuta a ciudadano mexicano

Por Por Emile Schepers

En un insulto al presidente Obama, el gobernador republicano de Texas, Rick Perry, permitió en la noche de este jueves la ejecución de un ciudadano mexicano, aunque tal acción queda en violación a las obligaciones contratadas por EEUU bajo la Convención de Viena de 1963 sobre relaciones consulares con los estados de la unión norteamericana.

La Convención de Viena estipula, entre otras provisiones, que los ciudadanos de un país detenidos en otro tienen el derecho de consultar “sin tardanza” con el consulado de su propio país, y a ser informado de tal derecho por las autoridades que lo mantengan detenido. Si se lo pide el detenido, la policía tiene que tomar la iniciativa con, por ejemplo, el envío por fax de información pertinente al consulado del país del detenido.

A pesar de esto, los gobiernos estatales y en especial el de Texas, han desconocido sin más a la Convención de Viena y ni permiten a los extranjeros detenidos ningún contacto con sus consulados respectivos ni les hace informar sobre sus derechos de pedirlo. Según reportes, hay otros ciudadanos de la República de México actualmente detenidos en las prisiones estatales de Texas, presos a los cuales se les han negado sus derechos bajo esta Convención. Uno de ellos fue Humberto Leal García, él que fue ejecutado por inyección letal este jueves. Leal, que fue llevado a EEUU como niño sin papeles, fue hallado culpable de haber asaltado y asesinado a una

jovencita de 16 años, Adria Saucedo, en 1994 cuando él estaba bajo la influencia de drogas y alcohol. Por medio de sus abogados, él argumentaba que no hubiera sido hallado culpable, ni mucho menos condenado a la muerte, si hubiera sido informado de sus derechos y si hubiera podido coordinar su defensa legal con el consulado mexicano. Sin embargo, antes de ser ejecutado, reconoció su responsabilidad por el asesinato y pidió a la familia de la víctima su perdón.

Esto todo lo hemos visto antes. Durante la década de los 1990, Texas argumentó similarmente que la Convención de Viena no se aplica a los ciudadanos extranjeros condenados a muerte en Texas, porque aunque el Congreso federal haya aprobado la Convención de Viena, que por eso llegó a ser parte íntegra del corpus legal norteamericano, el Congreso nunca ha pasado legislación específica ordenándoles a los estados a cumplir con el tratado. Sin embargo, varios comentarios de Perry y sus partidarios han provocado dudas sobre si en Texas reconocen la misma aplicación a su entidad de los tratados internacionales firmados por EEUU.

Numerosas figuras públicas, incluyendo a oficiales militares, pedían a Perry que se prorrogara la ejecución, estos últimos porque los activos militares norteamericanos desplegados en otros países bien pudieran ser sujetos a una prosecución injusta si se reconociera que EEUU haya renunciado su participación en el pacto.

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