

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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June 2, 2012

Did Dharun Ravi verdict bring justice for Tyler Clementi?

By Norman Markowitz

In September 2010, Tyler Clementi, a freshman at Rutgers University, where I have taught for 41 years, committed suicide. Soon it was discovered that Clementi, who was gay, had been harassed by his roommate, Dharun Ravi, who used a computer web camera to both film and send to other students Clementi's sexual liaison with an older man.

As a member of the Rutgers Faculty Senate I called for a policy of expelling students who commit such acts against fellow students, faculty, or staff members. The response of the administration was to do nothing and wait for the incident to blow over. Quietly, the administration did enact a few mild dormitory reforms, permitting LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) students to opt out of difficult room situations, but it did little to address either the issue of homophobia or the most elemental right to privacy. The New Jersey state legislature responded with strong anti-bullying legislation.

Ravi refused to admit that his actions were motivated by anti-gay bigotry, claiming they were merely a prank. There was much disbelief of that claim in the Rutgers community.

At the same time, Ravi apparently feared taking the plea bargain offered him (a guilty plea and no jail time) because he would be subject to deportation, which some people felt was unfair. Ravi, who is from India, is a member of a U.S. minority group which has faced hate crimes and violence in New Jersey.

Potentially, he faced up to 10 years in prison. Most observers believed that a prison sentence



was necessary under New Jersey law, but some felt that sending him to prison would only enhance the tragedy.

This week the sentence was handed down: 30 days in jail, plus community service and an \$11,000 fine. Gay activists and others across the political spectrum expressed anger because of the perceived trivial nature of the sentence.

Rutgers students were not on campus when the sentence was announced. However, the outgoing university administration, busy with its refusal to sign a collective bargaining agreement with part-time lecturers (the most vulnerable group of

T H I S W E E K :

- **Did Dharun Ravi verdict bring justice?**
- **Editorial: Veterans need more than flag waving**
- **Mariela Castro: Cuba moving toward LGBT equality**
- **NYC public workers battle Bloomberg**
- **Lavacoche demandan empleadores alegando abusos**

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faculty members), said nothing.

How can we make sense of this tragic and

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complicated case? Conservatives, broadly defined, usually believe in punishment as the solution to bad actions, although they are selective about who is to be punished. Progressives, broadly defined, usually believe that punishment in itself without rehabilitation leads to further bad acts.

In this case, punishment, given the New Jersey hate crime law, was clearly merited.

His actions led directly to the death of Clementi and he needed to atone for his crime. Ravi should not have had to fear deportation for his plea bargain. But he should, as part of any plea bargain or trial sentencing, have been made to admit and understand why he did what he did.

For example, he could have been ordered to work with both gay rights activists and public officials to help high school and college students understand why the targeting of gay men and lesbians for intimidation and humiliation violates elemental human rights. In effect, he should have been given the choice of becoming a spokesman against homophobia.

If he refused to engage in that course of conduct, then he should have been given a major

prison sentence under the law. That would have constituted justice for Tyler Clementi.

As for the outgoing Rutgers University administration, which for years has engaged in self-congratulations about the diversity of its student body, it is too late now to use this tragedy to develop a required course of anti-discrimination education for all incoming students, and too late for it to confront the consequences of its policies.

High tuition costs, threats from financial loan services, poor conditions in dormitories and classrooms - these are the subtext for undergraduate students' lives at Rutgers today.

I will recommend such a required course next year in the Rutgers University Faculty Senate. Hopefully, the incoming administration will be open to such ideas and listen seriously to the undergraduate students whose education, both professional and citizenship, is the foundation and future of Rutgers University and all U.S. public universities.



Norman Markowitz writes for the People's World.

Veterans need more than flag waving

By PW Editorial Board

Eighteen veterans each day kill themselves. 18. An average of 950 veterans each month attempt suicide. 950.

Only 1 percent of Americans have served in the military, yet former service members make up 20 percent of suicides in the United States. More veterans have committed suicide than the number of soldiers killed in combat.

Shouldn't this be considered a national emergency?

Multiple deployments for service members, including national guardsmen, may be one of the major factors for the eye-popping statistics. Almost half - 800,000 - of the more than 2 million Americans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan have been on multiple deployments.

Writing in *The Daily Beast*, former Marine Anthony Swofford says being in combat for long periods of time has a profound impact on the human psyche.

"[W]hen you teach a kid how to kill and send him to combat a few times, he will come home mightily changed, with a dependence on weaponry and a tendency to treat violence as a perfectly acceptable way of solving a problem," he writes.

For women veterans, the suicide rate is three times more than their civilian counterparts. Women service members have the additional burden of being at least three times more likely to be

raped, sexually assaulted or harassed than other American women.

Although far from perfect, the Veterans Administration has responded to the crisis. In the first place, the VA set up a national suicide hotline that receives about 10,000 calls a month from current service members and veterans.

Tragically, but not surprisingly, in the much-ballyhooed Republican budget with Rep. Paul Ryan's name on it and supported by GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney, veterans are totally missing. The word "veteran" doesn't even appear, according to Veterans For Common Sense, a group that also lauded Obama's commitment to veterans, outlined in his budget.

With the Republicans' push for austerity - cutting all programs that help people - the VA will continue to be understaffed and underfunded. Veterans report that VA caseworkers see 20-30 people per shift, and there are no separate facilities for women veterans.

Veterans themselves are organizing to deal with suicides and other issues through support groups, the arts, and antiwar, political or social groups. All approaches are needed to end this national shame.

Veterans need more than flag waving. Remember this November who the hypocrites are and who keeps their promises.

Being in combat for long periods of time has a profound impact on the human psyche.

Mariela Castro in San Francisco: Cuba moving toward LGBT equality

By Marilyn Bechtel

In remarks greeted with vigorous, repeated applause, Mariela Castro Espin, director of the Cuban National Center for Sex Education, told a standing-room-only crowd in San Francisco of the progress Cuba has made toward equal rights for its LGBT community, and the work that lies ahead to win full equality.

Her May 23 presentation at the S.F. Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community Center was among several Bay Area appearances this week. On May 24 Castro, who is among dozens of Cuban scholars participating in the Latin American Studies Association's annual meeting, chaired a panel there on sexual politics. Earlier in the week she met with medical professionals and transgender advocates at S.F. General Hospital.

Speaking in Spanish, Castro told the audience that a resolution the Cuban Communist Party passed at its conference in January, to fight against all forms of discrimination including that based on sexual orientation and sexual identity, "opens the door to begin to create public policy."

She called the resolution "a beginning, but an important beginning."

Castro has also reintroduced a bill for civil unions in the National Assembly.

She said the Federation of Cuban Women and the Federation of Cuban Jurists are calling for giving same-sex couples the same rights as opposite-sex couples. Married and unmarried opposite-sex couples already have the same rights.

"We first proposed marriage," she said, "but legal scholars, and some Communist Party members, were up in arms. So as not to lose the fight, we proposed equal recognition of same-sex couples."

A proposal on adoption was also postponed. "So we have to go step by step," she said, "but the important thing is to win rights."

Mariela Castro, the daughter of Cuban President Raul Castro and the late Vilma Espin is married, with three children. She said her longstand-



ing concern for lesbian and gay rights grew both from "the sense of social justice that we grow up with in Cuba," and from her mother's work.

Castro also said her mother, as president of the Federation of Cuban Women, had long ago proposed that marriage be defined "as the union between two people".

Asked her reaction to President Obama's recent statement supporting same-sex marriage, Castro said she is "heartened" by the president's decision. Marriage equality can be a political issue in elections, she said, "I think he speaks from his heart, it is something he really believes in."

She said Cubans "celebrate" Obama's loosening of some restrictions including travel, but observed that the president hasn't been able to return U.S.-Cuba relations to the level during the Carter administration.

To great applause, Castro urged Americans to fight for normalization because the current situation violates the rights of the U.S. people.

Anti-Cuba activists have protested the State Department's issuance of a visa to Mariela Castro, in view of restrictions barring visitor visas to Cuban government or Communist Party officials. One such protest, by U.S. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee, came despite Ros-Lehtinen's strong support for gay and transgender rights.

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NYC public workers battle Bloomberg

By Mark Gruenberg

Even as Mayor Michael Bloomberg ladles out billions of dollars to contractors in questionable deals, the multimillionaire former businessman is trying to cut pay of 10,000 of the city's municipal trades workers. That's forced their union, AFSCME District Council 37, to battle him on both issues.

The union's response is by publicity and via Congress and courts. The council has released reports detailing the \$9.2 billion-plus Bloomberg has spent on more than 18,000 contractors. And on May 22, 11 Democratic U.S. representatives asked the federal government to probe the spending, since many of these dollars are federal funds.

Meanwhile, District Council 37 and other city unions got a state judge in Manhattan to temporarily halt Bloomberg's pay and benefits "prevailing rate" changes. Those changes would have cut pay, sick leave, and vacation time for 10,000 municipal trades workers. A hearing on the case is scheduled for June 13.

"This is a morally reprehensible assault on the wages and benefits of the city's blue-collar workers - laborers, sewage treatment workers, highway repairers, locksmiths, plumbers, electricians, and more - men and women who use their smarts, their skills and their strength to do the hardest, dirtiest jobs that help make this city run," Council 37 Executive Director Lillian Roberts said of Bloomberg's prevailing rate cuts.

District Council 37 has released reports, beginning in 2009, about waste and high costs in Bloomberg's contracting out plans, and showing how using city workers instead can save money. The total is more than \$9 billion for at least 18,000 contracts.

Lavacoches de Los Angeles demandan empleadores alegando abusos

Por E. J. Tamara

Cuatro trabajadores hispanos de tres negocios de lavado de autos llevaron sus reclamos salariales el lunes a la corte, alegando abusos laborales como incumplimiento de pago por tiempo extra y trabajo sin tiempo de descanso.

La demanda fue presentada ante un tribunal civil de Los Angeles por el Fondo Mexicoamericano para la Defensa Legal y Educación, a nombre de los lavacoches. Alega violaciones laborales de parte de los negocios Lincoln Millenium Car Wash Inc., Silver Wash Inc. y Gold Wash, perteneciente a Bijan, Edna y Kambiz Dimavandi, respectivamente.

En general, la querrela alega nueve violaciones laborales, incluyendo incumplimiento del pago de salario mínimo, y pide una compensación por daños y perjuicios. También pide estatus de demanda colectiva, que según Víctor Viramontes, abogado de la organización pro derechos civiles que presentó la querrela, podría reunir más de 100 trabajadores afectados.

Uno de los demandantes, Marcial Hernández, dijo que los dueños de Lincoln Millenium, donde trabajó ocho años, no le pagaron horas extras y muchas veces ni siquiera le daban agua durante los veranos.

"Cuando me quejaba, tomaban represalias y me recortaban las horas y no me daban tiempo para almorzar", dijo el inmigrante de 27 años, quien no quiso divulgar su país de origen.

Una persona que contestó el telé-

fono del Millenium Car Wash dijo ser el administrador pero no quiso dar su nombre ni comentarios respecto a la demanda. Los tres negocios de la familia Dimavandi están ubicados en el área de Santa Mónica.

La demanda podría ser el primer paso para la sindicalización de los trabajadores.

"Por ahora, la meta es coordinar esfuerzos y darles ánimo", dijo Neidi Domínguez, coordinadora de estrategias de la Campaña Clean Car Wash, responsable de la sindicalización de los únicos tres negocios de lavado de auto en el área de Los Angeles.

La Campaña Clean Car Wash logró la sindicalización de los negocios en cuestión entre noviembre del año pasado y abril del presente, iniciando sus batallas con querrelas similares a la presentada el lunes. Los lavacoches agremiados están representados por la sucursal 675 del sindicato United Steel Workers.

De acuerdo con la campaña, los dueños de negocios de lavado de autos en California reportaron 872 millones de dólares en ganancias en el 2002. Empresarios en el condado de Los Angeles reportaron un tercio del total de estas ganancias, o 251 millones de dólares. Sin embargo, agrega el estudio, muchos de estas empresas pagan a sus empleados menos del salario mínimo y permiten una serie de abusos laborales.

La campaña calcula que hay entre 7.000 y 10.000 lavacoches en el área de Los Angeles.