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Thousands protest new hydrofracking laws

By Anita Waters

Thousands rallied here June 17 to protest hydrofracking, or hydraulic fracturing, the destructive new process for gas extraction from underground shale beds. They marched to the statehouse and held a People's Assembly to map a fight back against laws enacted by Republican Gov. John Kasich giving the industry a green light.

The rally culminated a three-day conference that brought together climate scientists, local and national activists and community leaders.

Despite stormy weather, the enthusiastic crowd gathered in Arch Park and donned blue bandanas with the slogan "Don't Frack Ohio."

Bill McKibben, the highly respected author and environmentalist, said action on climate issues is urgent because "the changes that are happening are so big and so dangerous." May, he said, "was the 327th consecutive month that the global temperature was above the 20th century average. It was the warmest spring in this country that we've ever recorded."

While applauding efforts to end fracking in Ohio, he said, "we need you to worry about more than just your own place, important as that is. Because we aren't actually going to win the fight against global warming one pipeline and one frackwell at a time. We're going to have to take on the fossil fuel industry."

This means challenging the "special break" this industry currently enjoys - being allowed to emit its waste products - carbon - into the atmosphere of earth free of charge, he said. Also subsidies the U.S. government gives to the fossil fuel



industry must end. Over the next decade, \$113 billion in subsidies are slated to go to the richest industry on earth, he said.

McKibben said his group, 350.org, would be joining others later this week for Rio+20 Earth Summit. We are in the "symbolic company of people the world around," he said.

"There are people who have the exact same thing in their hearts as you, a feeling for their place and a feeling for their future and it's that feeling that we've got to turn into political power."

The group's name refers to the 350 parts per million that experts say is the safe upper limit for carbon dioxide in our atmosphere. The number

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currently stands at 380 parts per million.

350.org has a double meaning in Ohio, said

Over the next decade, \$113 billion in subsidies are slated to go to the richest industry on earth.

Josh Fox, director of the film, *Gasland*.

"It stands for something else today too: \$350,000 that the gas industry gave to your governor, to make sure that he's not your governor anymore, to make sure that he's the governor of the gas industry."

Fox recalled when the gas industry first came to his door in Pennsylvania. Few people knew about fracking then and the industry was able to get away with a lot of misinformation. They promised windfall profits for landowners and minimal environmental consequences. Now people know that hydrofracking contaminates groundwater, pollutes the air, makes surrounding areas unlivable and storing the waste causes earthquakes.

The cash that the industry sends to politicians is like a symbolic fracking well, he said.

"\$350,000 -- that means that there's a horizontal well bore going down from somewhere in the gas industry, snaking underneath the capital and injecting money up through the chamber. They're fracking up your government."

A bill passed last month opens up Ohio to more than 2,000 wells and allows companies to

shield the chemicals they use in the fracking process from public scrutiny, as "trade secrets." Fox called the legislation a "red carpet" for the gas industry.

Mary Clair Rietz of the Ohio Alliance for People and Environment said the legislation also takes away a local community's right to prevent unwanted industrial activities. This has caused towns like Athens and Meyers Lake to use creative approaches to ban fracking as a violation of human rights to clean air and water.

Mansfield will hold a referendum in November to prevent fracking waste from being transported through the town. Rietz also recognized the handful of legislators who have stood up against the fossil fuel industry.

The crowd marched to the Ohio Statehouse and convened a People's Assembly inside the rotunda. There, testimony was heard from people whose voices had been silenced in the legislature's haste to welcome gas industry activities.



Anita Waters writes for the People's World.

Raise the minimum wage!

By PW Editorial Board

One of Wisconsin's lesson for labor in the 2012 elections is that labor's messaging has to be clear. Unions and labor need to speak independently for all of the working class and working families. We cannot let the corporate right-wing brand us as a special interest, only out for our members.

The issue of raising the minimum wage is a case in point. Rep. Jessie Jackson, Jr. and Rep. John Conyers, with 20 cosponsors, have introduced H.R. 5901: "Catching Up To 1968 Act of 2012." It is a simple one-page piece of legislation that would raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour and index the minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), meaning that every year the minimum wage would increase according to the rise in the CPI.

What a gift to the labor movement for the 2012 elections.

By championing this critical raise in the minimum wage we say to all that labor is about bringing the lowest wage workers up.

Championing HR 5901 while campaigning for candidates puts labor in the forefront of fighting for all workers. Raising the minimum wage is a great way to fight the "race to the bottom."

Not to mention that raising the minimum wage is a very important force for improving

the economy. The real "uncertainty" is lack of demand for goods and services. Small business won't hire until they see the need to meet increases in demand. Minimum wage earners have to spend all of their income on necessities from food to housing. Further raising the minimum wage puts upward pressure on wages for all workers. It sets a floor.

Women, youth and people of color are found in minimum wage jobs way out of proportion to their participation in the workforce. A fighting campaign for raising the minimum wage can also be a vital part of the struggle for working class unity.

Of course the minimum wage cannot be labor's only issue in the elections. But added to the mix of defending workers rights, fighting for real jobs programs like infrastructure building and repair, speaking out clearly against racism, for immigrant rights, and against all efforts to divide the working class, HR 9501 can be a real clear message.

The labor movement has always been a champion of a livable minimum wage. Now, the Jackson/Conyers bill gives labor a critical tool for putting the fight for all workers into the election mix.

Not to mention that raising the minimum wage is a very important force for improving the economy.

Fish gotta swim and George Will gotta lie

By Sam Webb

Part of the mindset of ideologues of the right is their absolute disdain for government regulation of private corporations. They want none of it.

An example of this was on display in a recent Washington Post column by George Will, who is also a regular on ABC's "This Week" and a dean of the conservative movement.

Quoting the right-wing Hudson Institute's Charles DeMuth, Will writes that regulations are pursued to the point where they are "costly beyond any plausible measure of their benefits."

He goes on to say, again quoting DeMuth, that regulatory power easily becomes "arbitrary and capricious."

Indeed, government regulators are out of control in Will's view. "Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly and regulators, too, have a metabolic urge to do what they were created to do," he says scornfully.

After all, the regulatory structure that grew out of the New Deal and the Great Society has been systematically dismantled over the past three decades, thanks to the ascendancy of the right wing and the rise of neoliberalism. The problem at this juncture is not too many regulations, as Will suggests, but too few.

But even a torn and tattered regulatory state is too much for Will to stomach; he won't be happy until every last regulation that limits corporate profit-seeking behavior is eliminated.

So what if a regulatory-free environment results in miners dying in unsafe mines. Or oceans, lakes and rivers turning into polluted sinks. Or carbon building up in the atmosphere to the point where humanity's future is threatened.

Apparently, none of this is on Will's radar.

Will and his counterparts on the right have been captured by "market fundamentalism" - a belief that capitalist markets when free and competitive provide optimal solutions to both economic and social problems. In their view, capitalism, if not burdened by regulations, generates jobs for a growing workforce, lifts up living standards of



working people, and operates at full or near-full productive capacity.

But this is a fairy tale, peddled as truth.

First of all, capitalist markets are neither free nor competitive, but rather are dominated by a few giant corporations in nearly every line of production. There are many small producers, but they don't control the economy.

Second, an unregulated capitalism (or a regulated one for that matter) by no stretch of the imagination provides jobs for all or nearly all. The situation at this moment and in the foreseeable future is just the opposite.

Third, notwithstanding all the prattle, capitalism in its deregulated and regulated forms - as John Maynard Keynes and Karl Marx argued - has no inherent tendency toward full employment and full utilization of society's productive resources.

It is hard to believe that Will doesn't know all this. The economic depression of recent years that has no end in sight should be enough to cast doubt on the efficacy of free, competitive, and unregulated markets. But he reveals that his views are shaped more by the needs of an exploiting class and the corrupting influence of access to power and privilege than by reality.

In the short run that may serve Will and the class that he represents well. In the longer run it will be their Waterloo.

**This is a fairy tale,
peddled as an
unassailable
scientific truth.**

Parents occupy Oakland school to protest closures

By Marilyn Bechtel

Despite the Oakland Unified School District's order that they leave the premises, parents and teachers occupying Lakeview Elementary School since June 15 say they plan to stay until the district agrees to keep their school and four others open, reversing its decision to close them as of the end of the school year.

The school district contends that Oakland has too many schools for the number of students in the system, and maintains the closings are needed because of the budget cuts it has suffered.

It wants to turn Lakeview, located in a lively business and residential district near scenic Lake Merritt, into administrative offices. Other schools slated for closure are to become charter schools, and one is being leased to neighboring Emeryville. All five schools now serve diverse, largely black and Latino populations.

However, parents maintain that the closings are part of a drive toward privatizing public education not only in Oakland but across the country.

Dozens of parents, teachers, children, and union and community supporters were on hand after the order to disperse was issued. As they stood in front of the school, parents and teachers shared their perspectives on the school district's action.

The threatened closures "send a message to kids" from working-class, largely black and Latino areas in east and west Oakland "that they are not important, that they can be separated and dispersed to other schools," said Lakeview teacher Tamica Groves, an Oakland teacher for a decade who has just finished her first year at Lakeview. Groves said children transferred to other schools would face both safety and transportation issues.

Democracia con barrera

Por Alberto Ampuero

Millones de votantes podrían quedar excluidos de las próximas elecciones en Estados Unidos ante el creciente número de leyes que imponen mayores condiciones a los ciudadanos antes de que puedan votar

Estas medidas afectan de manera desproporcionada a las minorías, en particular la latina.

La ley más sobresaliente es la del requisito de mostrar en los puestos de votación un carné de identidad con foto emitido por una autoridad gubernamental. La mayoría de la gente tiene esta identificación, pero la proporción de latinos que no la poseen es mucho más alta que en otros grupos demográficos.

En 2009 solo había dos estados que requerían carné de identificación, Indiana y Georgia. Ahora se incluyen Alabama, Carolina del Sur, Kansas, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Rhode Island y Wisconsin.

Varios de estos estados donde se aplica la ley han experimentado el mayor crecimiento de población hispana en los últimos años.

También expresa que las nuevas reglas son el fruto de esfuerzos de parte de grupos conservadores. De legislaturas y gobernaciones que estaban dominadas por demócratas y ahora son republicanas.

De acuerdo al Centro Brennan, un instituto de política pública, más de tres millones de personas se verían excluidas por el requisito de identidad con foto.

Las razones hay que buscarlas en un dato demográfico irrefutable: los latinos en Estados Unidos no sólo son una porción cada vez mayor de la población total, también son el grupo de electores que más ha crecido.

En Nuevo México, por ejemplo, el voto hispano subió del 32% del total en 2004 al 41% en 2008; en Texas se mantuvo en el 20%, en Arizona subió del 12% al 16% y en Nevada del 10% al 15%. En Florida ronda el 15% del sufragio.

En total, más de 21,7 millones de latinos reúnen los requisitos para votar en las elecciones de 2012, la mayor cifra de la historia.

Los activistas que defienden el derecho al sufragio enumeran varios obstáculos, como la reducción de fechas para la votación anticipada.

Las elecciones en Estados Unidos se realizan los martes, un día laborable. En 2000, una reforma electoral autorizó el voto anticipado para aquellos trabajadores que no podían ausentarse de su trabajo.

No son las únicas medidas para limitar el derecho al voto de las minorías. En Florida, Texas, Wisconsin, Tennessee y Kansas se impuso una prueba de ciudadanía mediante un certificado de nacimiento, de naturalización o un pasaporte para aquellos que se registran para votar.

Los impedimentos también se presentan en el proceso de registrar nuevos electores. Florida aprobó el año pasado una reforma de la ley electoral que impone restricciones a las agrupaciones electorales para registrar a sus miembros

Otra barrera que se presenta es el idioma. Según el Acta de Derecho al Voto, ciertas jurisdicciones que tienen un número de minorías, como las latinas, están obligadas a ofrecer asistencia en español. Eso incluye notificaciones, papeletas electorales y señalización en español, así como traductores en los puestos de votación.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523

Email: contact@peoplesworld.org