

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## Labor leaders meet to mobilize for 2012 elections

By John Wojcik

Leaders of almost every labor union in the country are arriving in Orlando for a special meeting of the AFL-CIO Executive Council to launch the labor movement's program for the 2012 elections. That program will undoubtedly involve a strong commitment by labor to re-elect President Obama.

The labor leaders are also intent on coming out of their gathering this week with clear plans for both rebuilding the economy in a way that works for the majority and a plan to reach out to communities that go well beyond the confines of the labor movement itself.

The mood of the arriving labor leaders is upbeat, and probably for good reason. Despite the unprecedented attacks on the labor movement by Republicans this year, unions and their allies have had some unprecedented success.

In Wisconsin, they defeated two GOP state senators who backed the attack on collective bargaining rights by that state's extremist Gov. Walker, and, after collecting over a million signatures they have forced him into an unprecedented recall election.

In Ohio, the labor movement succeeded in winning the support of an overwhelming majority of the state's voters to overturn the anti-labor SB 5 law passed by that state's legislature.



Labor, just last week, was a major force in pulling off a dramatic voting rights, workers' rights, and immigrant rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

The press is expected to receive briefings on planned election work from Mike Podherzer, Director of the AFL-CIO Political Department, David Boundy, director of the federation's campaign department, and Karen Nussbaum, Director of Working America. Millions of non-union members across the country now belong to her group and are expected to play a major role in the 2012

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elections.

Major unions in the AFL-CIO have already endorsed President Obama for reelection and the

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executive council is expected to lay the groundwork this week for an AFL-CIO endorsement of his re-election bid.

Randi Weingerten, president of the American Federation of Teachers is expected to be on hand with a plan to step up the fight against education cuts. Weingerten has led a campaign against the teacher bashing that has become so fashionable in right-wing circles.

The federation can also be expected to put forward a jobs agenda that not only supports the president's proposals, but goes well beyond them. Leo Gerard, president of the United Steelworkers, has been pushing for massive programs to rebuild the nation's infrastructure and strike out into the field of clean energy.

Sources say the unions will also push hard for a plan to stop the bleeding of jobs in the public sector. The latest reports from the Labor Department show that while there is growth in employment in the nation recently, public sector jobs continue to be cut.

The labor leaders will, of course, tackle the Republican attack on voting rights. Voter I.D. laws enacted all over the country by Republican

state legislators, they say, would disenfranchise five million people, primarily the poor, minorities, and students.

Arlene Holt Baker, the federation's executive vice president and the highest-ranking African American labor leader in the country, has made this her priority. She just helped lead the march from Selma to Montgomery. Also heavily involved in mapping a plan on voting rights that will be announced this week are Larry Cohen, president of the Communications Workers of America, and Fed Richmond, vice president of the United Steelworkers.

The labor leaders will spend as much as half a day discussing ways to organize and reach out to communities beyond the labor movement itself. They don't engage in this discussion as novices. They do it after a year in which unions have forged strong alliances with civil rights, immigration rights, and voting rights groups. There have also been major breakthroughs forging alliances with non traditional labor organizations.



**John Wojcik is the People's World labor editor.**

## Political process to end Syria bloodshed

By PW Editorial Board

**K**ofi Annan, the former UN secretary-general, is warning against further militarization of the Syrian conflict. And he is urging Syrian opposition forces to find a political solution that includes meeting with government representatives.

"I hope that no one is thinking very seriously of using force in this situation," Annan said. "I believe any further militarization would make the situation worse."

At the news conference, which followed talks with Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby, Annan said he would be making "realistic" proposals to resolve the conflict. He said his mission was to start a "political process" in Syria to resolve the conflict there, and his only priority was the welfare of the Syrian people. "They are a brave, ancient people and they deserve better," he said.

But any political solution must involve not just self-appointed leaders but all sectors of Syria's people, including the country's many minorities, its workers, and its left, progressive and social justice forces. It also has to include the many Syrians who, for a variety of reasons including not-unfounded fear of an Islamist or al-Qaeda takeover, continue to support the Assad regime.

It is only through the involvement of all sec-

tions of the Syrian people that meaningful peace, democracy, human rights and economic and social justice can be brought into being in Syria. That will undoubtedly lead at some point to the end of the Assad regime, a remnant of the one-person one-party dictatorships that Britain and France, and later the U.S., found it useful to set up and bolster in the Middle East. But to make the ouster of Assad, by any means necessary, the sole initial demand serves only to ramp up the bloodshed on all sides.

"When I see the casualness with which some of these folks talk about war, I'm reminded of the costs involved in war," he told reporters at a White House news conference. "This is not a game. And there's nothing casual about it."

"If some of these folks think that it's time to launch a war, they should say so, and they should explain to the American people exactly why they would do that and what the consequences would be," the president said.

In the past, he said, in an obvious reference to the Iraq war, "when we haven't thought it through and it gets wrapped up in politics - we make mistakes. And typically it's not the folks who are popping off who pay the price."

**"I hope that no one is thinking very seriously of using force in this situation."**

# Alberta oil sands: bear death toll rises, Lakotas protest

By Blake Deppe

**B**lack bears are frequently wandering into the oil sands of Alberta, Canada in search of food. And they are being shot on site, by the hundreds, by conservation officers. As the dirty fuel known as 'tar sands' is being mined, the local wildlife is being subjected to the consequences.

The National Wildlife Federation has stated that the senseless killing of these bears (and other animals, including wolves and caribou) can be avoided, but the Canadian oil industry and government are putting profits before responsible environmental welfare and management.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development noted that Fish and Wildlife conservation officers slaughtered 145 black bears in 2011, after the animals were drawn to garbage in the oil sands region. That was nearly three times the number of bears killed the year before, and the highest in recent history, said spokesman Darcy Whiteside.

NWF scientist Doug Inkley commented, "The [oil industry's] approach seems to be 'if it becomes a problem, kill it,' rather than prevent the problem in the first place. Humans are destroying bear habitat and not disposing of garbage properly. So, we kill the bears.

"This is 'death by a thousand cuts.' It may seem like there are plenty of black bears now, but look at what's happening: the tar sands area that could be developed is the size of Florida, and this is going to be repeated over and over and over if we keep encroaching on their habitat."

David Mizejewski, also with the NWF, added, "We make the choice about whether these bears are a problem or not. We've chosen to destroy their habitat and turn it into a garbage dump. We can make smarter choices and avoid conflicts with bears."

He explained that a short-term precautionary measure might be to have bear-proof trashcans,



as the animals can quickly become urban scavengers when given an incentive. The only long-term answer, however, that would really solve the problem would be to cease oil sands development altogether, to prevent outright decimation of the bears' environment.

"These animals don't have to die," Mizejewski concluded. "They're being slaughtered in part due to America's addiction to dirty oil."

That growing addiction - demonstrated recently by Republicans pushing strongly for the Keystone XL pipeline (and attacking President Obama for turning down the project) - is posing a threat not only to animals and the environment, but Native Americans as well:

On Mar. 5, five Lakotas on Pine Ridge Indian land in South Dakota were arrested after blocking two tar sands pipeline trucks from entering their territory, in what played out as a six-hour stand-off. The trucks, emblazoned with the words, 'Calgary, Alberta, Canada,' refused to turn around, the drivers claiming they "had corporate rights that supersede any other law."

Debra White Plume, one of the activists arrested, remarked, "We formed a blockade to stop tar sands oil mine equipment from entering our lands. We oppose the tar sands oil mine in solidarity with Mother Earth and our First Nation allies."

**They're being slaughtered in part due to America's addiction to dirty oil.**

## Michigan: Protect collective bargaining

By John Rummel

**J**oAnn Rowland was speaking at a state house press conference announcing the kickoff of the “Protect our Jobs” initiative. Working as a carpenter for the last 25 years has taught Rowland the importance of collective bargaining in protecting the health, safety and wages of workers, she says.

The initiative is a bold proposal supported by labor and its allies to add an amendment to the Michigan constitution guaranteeing the right of every worker to collectively bargain. The signatures of 320,000 registered voters are required to place the amendment on this November’s ballot.

The Protect our Jobs measure would establish the right to form a union, prohibit employers from retaliating, and prohibit politicians from passing laws that interfere with those rights.

Those speaking at the press conference said the initiative is a response to the legislature’s attack on Michigan’s middle class, from the taxing of seniors’ pensions and cutting funds for education (while at the same time lowering taxes on corporations) to the 80 plus bills in the legislature that dismantle the workers’ compensation system, prohibit school systems from deducting union dues or service fees, force the privatization of non-instructional school workers in public schools, eliminate prevailing wage requirements and remove the current requirement of employers to notify striking unions when they are hiring replacement workers.

A bill to prevent public employees from having a political candidate bumper sticker on the car they park in the “public facility” parking lot shows the depth of extremism.

Rowland said small businesses also have a stake. As the wages of Michigan’s working families go down, she said, she would be making fewer trips to stores and movie theaters.

## Sindicatos presionan a DHL

Por Wilmer Barzallo

**L**os sindicatos presionan a DHL para que garantice los derechos de la mano de obra ITUC.

Al tiempo que DHL se prepara para anunciar en Frankfurt los sólidos beneficios obtenidos, una coalición de organizaciones sindicales internacionales desafía a la empresa a que demuestre el respeto que profesa por la mano de obra que le ha ayudado a generarlos. Como parte de este desafío, la CSI, la UNI y la ITF inaugurarán Respect at DHL, el sitio web de una nueva campaña.

La CSI (Confederación Sindical Internacional), la ITF (Federación Internacional de los Trabajadores del Transporte) y la Federación Sindical Internacional UNI quieren que el gigante mundial DHL de servicios de logística garantice los mismos derechos básicos a todos sus trabajadores y trabajadoras, independientemente de su ubicación. De esta forma, el uso de detectores de mentiras así como los casos de intimidación denunciados por los empleados de algunas de sus filiales mundiales serán tan impensables como la idea de que los empleados de su sede alemana pudieran recibir ese tipo de trato.

“La mejor manera para DHL de celebrar el tipo de buenas prácticas que le gusta señalar es extenderlas a la totalidad de sus operaciones”, comentaba Alan Tate, Director de Campañas de la Federación Sindical Internacional UNI. “Para nosotros esto siempre ha consistido de dos cosas: diálogo y un acuerdo marco mundial negociado, que diga ‘sí, creemos que todos nuestros trabajadores/as se merecen los mismos derechos y protección básicos.”

“Seguir por esa vía le podría

haber ahorrado a la empresa la multa de 283.000 USD que se le impuso el mes pasado a su filial Exel por violaciones a la salud y seguridad, después de que la Administración de Salud y Seguridad Ocupacional de EE.UU. descubriera que durante cuatro años la filial no había informado de 42 casos de lesiones graves de trabajadores empleados en una planta que opera para el fabricante de chocolates Hershey’s”, añade Alan Tate.

“Dado que DHL se está embarcando en otro año de rentabilidad anticipada, este es el mejor momento para que la empresa garantice imparcialidad en todas sus operaciones – no sólo en algunas – y que establezca una estructura que permita la representación sindical para todos sus trabajadores y prohíba los tipos de violaciones, en ocasiones tremendas, de normas de civismo elemental que se especifican en este nuevo sitio web”, concluye.

Además de consejos para los trabajadores y trabajadoras de DHL, el nuevo sitio web incluye una serie de testimonios de antiguos empleados que explican cómo fueron amenazados, obligados a trabajar en exceso e incluso forzados a pasar una prueba con un detector de mentiras.

El Coordinador de la ITF, Ingo Marowsky, ha dicho: “DHL fue sancionada en Noruega, donde el Tribunal Laboral concluyó que la responsable sindical Monica Okpe había sido despedida con pretextos falsos, y le ordenaron que la reincorporaran y la indemnizaran. Este caso sirve para volver a recordar que DHL tiene que respetar los derechos de la mujer y todos los demás derechos que sus trabajadores necesitan que se les garanticen.”

### NATIONAL CONTACT

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

Email: contact@peoplesworld.org