

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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100,000 march for jobs in Puerto Rico

By José A. Cruz

Today we declare a State of Peaceful Insurrection of the people of Puerto Rico," declared Juan Vera, Methodist bishop of Puerto Rico, as he called for going from "protests to resistance to civil disobedience" against the economic policies of Gov. Luis Fortuño. The governor cut 25,000 public sector employees.

Puerto Rico normally suffers from double-digit joblessness during non-recessionary times.

An estimated 100,000-plus marched from seven points in the San Juan metropolitan area to a massive rally at the Plaza de las Américas shopping mall. Organizers reportedly chose the mall because it is seen as a symbol of transnational corporations and its culture of consumerism. It's the largest mall in the Caribbean and one of the largest in all of Latin America.

The mall's owners announced it would be closed the day of the strike. Strike leaders had threatened to close the mall down with massive picket lines.

The march was organized by the coalition All Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico, composed of labor unions, churches, civic, community and political groups. The protestors consisted of people from



all political groupings, even those who voted for Fortuño.

When the governor first announced his plans for lay-offs, members and local leaders of his own party, the annexationist New Progressive Party, told the press that even though they worked to get

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out the vote for him, they would protest his economic decisions.

Roberto Pagán, president of the Puerto Rican Union of Workers, said "today is the end of Luis Fortuño."

The most prominent symbol in the march, which marked a one-day general strike, was the

Two thousand people marched behind the banner “Solidarity is the charity of today.”

Puerto Rican flag, which thousands waved amidst union banners, and organizations’ signs.

The mayors of 30 of the 78 municipalities helped organize almost 200 buses to the march.

Among the two biggest union contingents were UTIER, the electrical workers union, and the Puerto Rican Federation of Teachers (FMPR). They were joined by other Puerto Rican and US-based unions.

Victor Rodriguez, a member of the FMPR, said he saw the march as a “wave of indignation against [the governor’s] attempt at privatization” of state services.

Delegations of U.S. union leaders also came to take part in the march, said José La Luz, a leader of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Another U.S. labor leader, Dennis Rivera of SEIU-1199, said the Service Employees International Union was “calling on U.S. workers to express their solidarity with the Puerto Rican workers.”

Meanwhile, a contingent of University of Puerto Rico students from the Law School and the

School of Urban Planning took over the highway from San Juan to Caguas, sitting down to block all traffic. Students from the medical school soon later joined them.

Journalists reported some drivers stuck on the highways have left their cars on the roads and joined the protest.

One of the biggest groups was led by Bishop Rubén González of the Catholic Diocese of Caguas. Two thousand people marched behind the banner, “Solidarity is the charity of today.”

Reports coming in from different municipalities said that many schools had to close down because large number of students, teachers and even principals didn’t show up.

The strike and march were first being planned by the trade union movement last spring as the governor announced his economic plans.



José A. Cruz is editor of Mundo Popular.

Problem is ‘private option’

By PW Editorial Board

If ever there was an argument for strong government action to guarantee health care for all it is the outrageous threat by the insurance industry that it will massively increase premium rates if it does not get its way on the health care bills now before Congress.

In a last-minute attempt to derail health care reform the industry released an already discredited report warning that average family premiums will go up by \$21,300 if even the woefully inadequate Senate Finance Committee bill is adopted.

The outfit commissioned to write the report has already backed off its own findings, saying it was instructed by the industry to discount from its considerations the parts of the bill that would save money for consumers.

As if that fraud were not enough the insurers are out with their own version of the “death panel” scare, telling seniors in TV ads that they will lose Medicare benefits if health care reform is enacted. (Reform would cut the profits they currently suck out of Medicare.)

These moves by the insurers are the best ar-

gument that can be made for a bigger rather than smaller government role in health care.

The insurance companies think they have thrown down the gauntlet. What they have actually done, however, is make the argument for why, at the very least, we need a plan that includes a strong public option and, even better, a single-payer plan that would eliminate the insurance vultures altogether.

Our representatives in government must respond to this bullying and stop feeding a parasitic industry whose only function is to profit from the people’s pain and suffering.

It should be clear to everyone, by now, that the problem here is the private option, not the public option. For-profit insurers are what’s wrong with our present health care system. What we need now is strong government action and regulation to rein them in. And if they don’t heed the people’s will, then a “Medicare for all” plan should be enacted.



For-profit insurers are what’s wrong with our present health care system.

Obama's Peace Prize: Wise and timely

By Juan Lopez

In conferring the Nobel Peace Prize on President Obama, the Nobel committee made a wise decision.. Despite fierce right-wing opposition at home, Obama is doing a remarkable job to overcome the legacy of 30 years of far-right corporate dominance. The Nobel committee highlighted Obama's efforts to curb nuclear weapons, his accent on international diplomacy and his overtures to the Muslim world.

The Republican response ran the right-wing gamut, from questioning Obama's accomplishments and his emphasis on diplomacy to the racist notion that he won through star power.

The response from some on the left was disappointing. Some said the committee "should have waited" while others said awarding the prize to a "war" president "cheapens" it.

In my view, these critics are not seeing the forest for the trees.

After 30 years of dominance by sections of the ruling class pursuing a militaristic, disastrous course, Obama's election and his first nine months in office are the clear skies following a prolonged and nightmarishly destructive storm.

The Obama administration is demonstrating a willingness to work with other nations on a host of issues, including nuclear weapons and the environment. Talks with leaders of Iran and others, prioritizing the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pledging to close the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, plus, relaxing travel to Cuba are among the significant initiatives.

These efforts are still in their infancy. When seen in isolation, they may seem to some like half-measures. But, understood in the context of the last 30 years, they represent a qualitative break with the past.

I'm not happy with all the administration's international and domestic policies. Like other left and progressive folks, I advocate ending the Afghanistan military venture.

I am mindful of the present balance of forces and the time needed to clean up the reactionary legacy Obama inherited; mindful of the makeup



of Congress, the media and other centers of corporate power where the Republican far right still has major sway.

I realize the Obama administration and the Democratic majority in Congress both contain a spectrum from right to left. I am mindful of the relative strength and level of unity of the labor movement and other progressive social forces and movements.

And I am aware of the depression-level economic crisis.

To ignore these realities leads to wrong conclusions about the current stage of struggle and what is needed.

Our strategic goal must be to consolidate the November 2008 victory against the far right in the 2010 and 2012 election cycle. Every tactical move must be made within this framework. There are no shortcuts.



Juan Lopez is a reporter for the Peoples World.

Obama is doing a remarkable job to overcome 30 years of far-right Republican corporate dominance.

May 22nd proclaimed Harvey Milk Day

By Marilyn Bechtell

The country's first-ever day of recognition for an openly gay person has been signed into law by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, along with other rights and protections for gay and lesbian Californians.

Reversing his veto of a similar measure last year, Schwarzenegger on Oct. 11 signed a bill designating May 22 as Harvey Milk Day. The date coincides with the birthday of the San Francisco supervisor who was the first openly gay man elected to prominent public office in the U.S.

State Senator Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, who introduced the measure, observed that the governor had "clearly evolved in his thinking."

Though Harvey Milk Day won't be a state holiday, schools will be encouraged to hold lessons "remembering the life of Harvey Milk, recognizing his accomplishments and familiarizing pupils with the contributions he made to this state."

Elected in 1977, Milk built coalitions with the city's other minority leaders at the same time he fought for rights and protections for gay and lesbian San Franciscans. "Wake up, wake up, America, no more racism, no more sexism, no more ageism, no more hatred ... no more!" he proclaimed in a Gay Freedom Day speech in 1978.

Milk and Mayor George Moscone were killed at city hall later that year by former San Francisco supervisor Dan White, a disgruntled political rival.

Arrestemos a los jefes de las compañías de seguro'

By Marilyn Bechtell

Casi como si fuera una escena del último film de Michael Moore, que lleva título sarcástico de "Capitalism - A Love Story", o sea en castellano, "Capitalismo - una historia de amor", un grupo de activista a favor de la reforma del sistema de salud entraron en el distrito financiero de esta ciudad el 6 de octubre y en las oficinas de la compañía de seguro médico Anthem Blue Cross/WellPoint en búsqueda de la jefa de la compañía, Angela Braley, para hacer un arresto ciudadano.

Antes de la marcha, unos 200 partidarios de una fuerte opción pública, incluso partidarios de la reforma basada en un solo pagador de seguro médico universal, se reunieron brevemente al empezar de la Calle Market donde oyeron cuentos de los horrores del sistema actual de salud de gente que tienen el seguro de Blue Cross.

Uno dijo que después visitas a dos hospitales, Blue Cross se negó pagar para el salón de emergencia. Esto causó que les dañaran el crédito. "Es chistoso que gente tengan miedo a la opción pública", dijo, "cuando hay tanta injusticia y burocracia aquí mismo con Athem Blue Cross".

Otra habló de cómo cancelaron el seguro de su tía después que Blue Cross se enteró de que la tía padecía de cáncer. Ella agregó, "Eso es un crimen".

Un tercero contó como Blue Cross le negó cobertura a su hija de 26 años después que ella sufrió de una muñeca adolorida. Dos años más tarde, dijo él, le ofrecieron a la hija un seguro inasequible que costaba \$800 al mes. "Hay muy mucha avaricia y no suficiente cuidado de salud en este sistema", concluyó.

Con todo y eso, los organizadores del evento declararon que había suficiente evidencia para hacer un arresto ciudadano de Ángela Braley y los participantes, voceando ¡Opción pública, ya! cruzaron la plaza, subieron las escaleras, por las puertas giratorias para entrar en el vestíbulo del edificio donde rodearon el lugar con una cinta amarilla que tenía el lema, "Es un delito negarnos servicios médicos".

Una vez le "informaron" a los manifestantes que Braley no estaba en su oficina, los manifestantes se mantuvieron en el vestíbulo un tiempo voceando consignas a favor de la reforma de salud antes de salir a la plaza.



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