

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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January 17, 2015

Athletes join growing movement for racial justice

By John Bachtell

Usually I stay out of politics and police brutality. I'm not saying all cops are bad or anything, I'm just saying what happened is uncalled for, and I think that hurt a lot of people. It hurt the nation," said Derrick Rose, star basketball player for the Chicago Bulls.

Rose was thoughtfully reflecting on the reasons he wore the "I can't breathe" t-shirt while warming up for a game against the Golden State Warriors. These were the final desperate words uttered by Eric Garner as he was being strangled by a police chokehold on Staten Island. A grand jury refused to indict the officer.

Scores of professional and college athletes, including entire teams, are following Rose's lead and speaking up. Given the enormous pressures on athletes to "shut up and play," the stand of NFL and NBA athletes, and players from the Georgetown Hoyas men's and Notre Dame women's basketball teams, is both courageous and unprecedented.

Rose and some close friends were contemplating the injustice as they watched thousands of people marching in Chicago. They had experienced incidents of racism, police brutality, and violence in the Englewood neighborhood where they grew up. Rose had already decided to speak out, concerned



about the future of his own two-year-old son.

While some police unions have issued condemnations, and racist vitriol has been directed against many of the players, they have received widespread support from teammates, fans, coaches, athletic directors and sports writers.

The entire Georgetown men's basketball team wore the t-shirts, becoming the first athletes on the college level to protest.

Afterwards Georgetown coach John Thompson

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III shared how the players arrived at their decision. "The emotions and feelings in the locker room are all over the place. It's not necessarily that everyone feels the same way. Emotions [range] from fear, to frustration, to confusion, to anger," said Thompson.

If all we're doing is teaching them to play sports, then we're missing the boat.

Thompson III's father is John Thompson, Jr., who has been outspoken for years against racism as a former coach for the Hoyas. Thompson, Jr., was the first African American coach to win an NCAA title. He also played professionally for the Boston Celtics during the late 1950s and 1960s and endured constant racist harassment.

The opposing team and its coach were equally supportive of the Hoyas' protest. "It's a pretty strong stance," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "It certainly shows a lot of solidarity amongst their unit."

The entire Notre Dame women's basketball team, composed of black and white players, wore the t-shirt. The idea originated with forward Taya Reimer, a white player, who suggested to her teammates they wear the shirts after students on the Notre Dame campus organized a die-in. The players were strongly backed by both the school athletic director and coach, both white.

"That's what we want our kids doing," said Athletic Director Jack Swarbrick. "If all we're doing is

teaching them to play sports, then we're missing the boat."

Hesburgh is a progressive theologian and former longtime president of Notre Dame University. In 2009, he defended the university's decision to invite President Obama to give the commencement address and confer him an honorary degree against right-wing opposition over the president's support for reproductive rights.

Outspoken Browns players' rep Johnson Bademosi hand scrawled the words on a warm-up jersey before a game against the Indianapolis Colts. He wrote a moving explanation of his actions on the website MMQB (Monday Morning Quarterback). "But this issue as I see it - police killings as a symptom of the systematic and historical devaluing of black lives - seemed too big to ignore," wrote Bademosi.



John Bachtell is National Chairman of CPUSA.

Republican House bill cuts workers' health care coverage

Mike Hall

Some one million workers could lose their employer-provided health insurance under a Republican bill (H.R. 30) passed by the House (252-172, with 12 Democrats crossing the aisle) today. On top of stripping health care coverage from those workers, the bill also would add some \$53.2 billion to the federal deficit over the next decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

The attack on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) comes just two days after Republicans approved legislation that could lead to cuts in Social Security disability and retirement benefits.

Under the ACA, large employers must provide health care coverage to employees who work 30 or more hours a week or they face a penalty. H.R. 30 kicks up the 30-hour threshold to 40 hours a week.

That increase, say health care experts, provides an incentive for employers to drop their 40-hour a week employees down to just 39 hours without a penalty and avoid any responsibility to

offer health benefits.

A UC Berkeley Labor Center study estimates there are 6.5 million people at risk of having their hours cut back under the Republican bill. That's nearly three times the number (2.3 million) that are vulnerable to losing their hours under the current 30-hour threshold.

But even with the current 30-hour a week definition, some employers are cutting back the hours of workers-many of whom worked 30-36 hours a week-to duck providing health coverage and avoid paying the ACA's penalty.

Since the ACA became law, the number of Americans with health insurance has increased by more than 10 million, with the majority of those receiving employer-provided health care. Since the law's requirement for Americans to have health insurance went into effect a year ago, the percentage of uninsured has dropped from 17.1 to 12.9 percent.

A UC Berkeley Labor Center study estimates that 6.5 million people are at risk of having their hours cut back under the Republican bill.

New UAW president out to end inequality

By John Rummel



In Detroit and across the country, United Auto Workers (UAW) President Dennis Williams spoke freely on issues affecting the UAW, labor and working people generally.

Addressing “inequality” in both the workplace and the community was a common thread.

He noted Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren was “absolutely” right to be concerned with the loosening of safeguards on Wall St. banks. The economy is growing for Wall St. but not Main St., declared Williams. When he first started working in the 1970’s, Williams noted, CEO pay averaged 42 times greater than that of workers; today, it’s 360 or 380 times as much. He warned the growing wealth gap threatens our democracy and is “unacceptable.”

He said the union is “dead against” fast tracking the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) saying NAFTA didn’t raise the standard of living of Mexican or South American workers, forced Mexican farmers off the land and resulted in lowering the wages for U.S. manufacturing workers. Six hundred thousand manufacturing jobs in the U.S. pay \$8.60 an hour; “We don’t want to repeat that with TPP.”

Another wage gap the UAW expects to close is in its own plants. Going forward we will see the UAW bargain for new contracts with General Mo-

tors, Ford and Chrysler. Williams said UAW members made “huge sacrifices” during the auto crisis of 2008 and 2009, the companies are now profitable and it’s time workers are rewarded. Entry level workers start at \$15.78 an hour and increase every 12 months up to \$19.28 an hour. Closing the gap between second tier workers and first tier (average wage of \$28) is a priority for the union in negotiations.

Williams said the union’s success in organizing VW’s Chattanooga plant can spur union growth in the region. He called “alarming” the increasing use of temporary workers that in reality work as permanent workers. He calls them “perma-temps” and accused employers of taking advantage of labor laws to grow a low wage, non-union workforce.

At Nissan’s U.S. plants 40 to 50 percent of the workforce is temporary, hired by an outside staffing agency, making organizing more difficult. Williams said that “throughout the industry, people should be “paid the same.”

Asked his thinking on the struggle of fast food workers for a living wage, Williams said having a minimum wage of \$15 is “very important.”

“It brings a new movement to this country and it’s a chance to “take back the country.”

Six hundred thousand manufacturing jobs in the U.S. pay \$8.60 an hour.

Breaking news: Obama frees remaining three of Cuba 5

Combined Sources

The remaining three of the Cuba 5 are being freed in a new deal between President Obama and Cuban president Raul Castro under which American Alan Gross has been released from a Cuban prison after five years. The three Cubans are three of five jailed in the U.S. after they were captured monitoring anti-Cuban terrorist activity that was being orchestrated from the Miami area. Rightwing terrorists funded in the U.S. had previously blown up a Cuban airplane, among numerous other activities.

Cuba has maintained that Gross had actually been spying during his mission to Cuba when he was arrested there five years ago, senior U.S. officials said Wednesday.

Officials said Gross was on a U.S. government plane bound for the U.S. Wednesday morning after being released on humanitarian grounds by the Cuban government at the request of the Obama administration. The deal could help clear the way for broader discussions on strengthening ties and perhaps ending the decades-long U.S. economic embargo against Cuba.

President Obama was to address the nation on Cuba, the White House said, and U.S. officials speaking on condition of anonymity said he was expected to announce the deal. President Castro of Cuba is expected to address his nation at the same time.

Shuler se une a Dreamer para apoyar a la acción ejecutiva

AFL-CIO

Es la típica historia de millones de personas que viven en este país”, dijo emocionada.

Hace menos de un mes la vida de Astrid dio un giro repentino. El presidente de EE.UU., Barack Obama, la mencionó como un ejemplo a seguir durante su discurso nacional anunciando su acción ejecutiva para darle un alivio migratorio a millones de personas.

Desde entonces Silva, una activista Dreamer (Soñadora) residente de la ciudad de Las Vegas, Nevada, ha continuado llevando su lucha adelante para defender esta acción ejecutiva que ayudará a millones de trabajadores a salir de las sombras y a reclamar los derechos laborales que les corresponden.

El Comité de lo Judicial del Senado de EE.UU. la citó para que testifique en su audiencia titulada “Manteniendo a las familias unidas: la orden ejecutiva migratoria del presidente y la necesidad para pasar una reforma migratoria amplia”. Fue allí en donde conoció a Liz Shuler, la secretaria-tesorera de la AFL-CIO, que también acudió a testificar a favor de la orden ejecutiva.

Nuestros sindicatos han visto de muy cerca cómo nuestro disfuncional sistema de inmigración permite que empleadores inescrupulosos bajen los salarios, metan zancadilla a los empleadores que siguen las reglas, y eliminen las ganancias logradas en la mesa de negociaciones”, indicó la se-

cretaria-tesorera Shuler en su testimonio. “Aunque este es un arreglo limitado y temporal, la central sindical AFL-CIO apoya la decisión del presidente de EE.UU. para brindarle una acción diferida y un permiso laboral a aproximadamente cinco millones de personas. Sus acciones ejecutivas mantendrán las familias unidas y permitirán que millones de personas puedan vivir y trabajar sin miedo”.

“Espero que vean que esta acción no solo ayuda a nuestro país a ser más fuerte, sino que también demuestra lo que representa Estados Unidos, el Sueño Americano, y la creencia que si trabajas duro, vas a poder sustentar a tu familia y trabajar sin temor”, acotó Silva.

Por su parte, la secretaria-tesorera Shuler, enfatizó que este es un paso importante para que millones de trabajadores tengan derechos.

“Es importante entender que aproximadamente ocho millones de los 11 millones de inmigrantes indocumentados en los EE.UU. se encuentran trabajando. Está mal permitir que un cinco por ciento de nuestros trabajadores a nivel nacional tengan dificultades para mantener a sus familias y que no tengan todos sus derechos y protecciones. Esto, además, crea un ambiente peligroso donde el robo salarial, acoso sexual, la muerte y las lesiones en el trabajo son muy frecuentes. Cuando ignoramos la explotación, todas las familias trabajadoras pagan los platos rotos”, dijo a los senadores, concluyendo su testimonio.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523
Email: contact@peoplesworld.org