

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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April 18, 2015

Nuclear weapons group praises historic Iran agreement

Special to Peoplesworld.org

The United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, and France, plus Germany (P5 + 1) and Iran reached an historic framework agreement regarding Iran's nuclear program last week. The "Common Understanding On Principles" claims to take steps that will keep Iran from producing a nuclear weapon in exchange for lifting international sanctions against the country.

"This historic agreement between the international community and Iran on its nuclear program will ensure it will not produce a nuclear weapon making the U.S. and the world a safer place," declared Paul Kawika Martin, the political director of Peace Action, the largest peace group in the U.S. founded to deal with abolishing nuclear weapons.

"This agreement promises to keep Iran at least a year away from having the fissile material needed to make a crude nuclear weapon," Martin said. "Without an agreement, that timeline shrinks to three months and the threat of war increases dramatically."

Martin has been working on the Iran issue for over eight years and had the rare opportunity to spend time in Iran.

Recent polls show that Americans oppose military intervention by 71 percent and support



reaching an agreement. The parties conducted marathon negotiations past their self-imposed deadline of Mar. 31 to develop the solutions that will create the Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action (CJPOA). The parties have until June 30 to agree the technical and implementation specifics and sign the deal that will last ten years with parts lasting longer including inspections and monitoring set to occur indefinitely.

"The success of these talks, again proves that

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diplomacy works. Instead of isolation, sanctions that don't affect leaders or military intervention that costs vast amounts of blood and treasure and untold long term costs and unintended consequences, the U.S. used dialogue, negotiations and the international community to solve conflict.

These negotiations may pave the way for more discussions on issues that will further reduce Middle East tensions.

These notable negotiations may pave the way for more discussions on issues like human rights and regional security that will further reduce Middle East tensions,” added Kevin Martin, executive director of Peace Action.

The agreement includes five major components: Decreasing the stockpile of material that could possibly be made into fissile material, limiting the quantity and quality of centrifuges that could make highly enriched uranium needed for a nuclear bomb, reconfiguring the nuclear reactor (and securing its spent fuel) in the city of Arak so it produces an insignificant amount of weapons grade plutonium, implementing unprecedented inspections and comprehensive monitoring and, finally, scheduling and implementing the lifting of specific sanctions on Iran.

“An agreement with Iran on its nuclear program is better than any imaginable alternative. Military strategists have said over and over again that a military intervention with Iran would at best slightly delay any nuclear program and at worst force Iran to engage in getting a nuclear weapon even if they had no such program. Any

letters or legislation that offers more sanctions or ties the hands of the negotiators are clearly meant to kill the talks. Poison pill bills like Senator Bob Corker’s that could delay implementation of an agreement for months and puts certification hurdles nearly impossible to clear should be defeated. Scuttling the accord would be very short sighted as an agreement with Iran on their nuclear program would likely lead to productive negotiations on other items of concern with the Iranian Government. More sanctions on Iran are likely to only embolden Iranian hardliner rather than solving the problem,” concluded Martin.



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Trumka says Colombia example exposes problems with trade deals

By John Wojcik

Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO, the nation’s largest labor federation is saying that the existing trade deal with Colombia shows that we can expect major problems if the Trans Pacific Partnership deal is approved by Congress. The AFL-CIO is arguing that even when protections for worker’s rights are negotiated into a trade agreement, countries, as is the case with Colombia, can violate those clauses.

A review of the facts four years after the United States and Colombia signed the Labor Action Plan to address entrenched labor rights violations, Colombian workers have suffered over 1,933 threats and acts of violence against union members. Included in the terror campaign against unions in that country during this period are 1,337 death threats and 105 actual assassinations, according to Colombia’s National Union School. Not included in those figures, horrific in and of themselves, are countless almost daily illegal firings, harassment and other forms of retaliation

for union organizing, says Trumka.

“The latest report issued by the NUS demonstrates that there has been virtually no progress over the past year in compliance with the Labor Action Plan,” said Trumka. The AFL-CIO, he said, “continues to stand with its Colombian brothers and sisters in demanding real action and full compliance, and supports every effort to help Colombia move towards a sustainable peace that includes full respect for fundamental labor rights.”

Trumka said the problems in Colombia are directly pertinent to the issue of approval or disapproval by Congress of the Trans Pacific Partnership deal.

“As the U.S. government negotiates broad trade agreements with Europe and the Pacific Rim, it must look back at the Labor Action Plan’s continued failure in protecting workers’ rights in Colombia, and not commit the same mistakes. It must ensure that these agreements deliver on the promises made for over twenty years about the broader benefits of expanding trade.

Investors and companies have received these benefits while workers have not.

GMO labels on food: Chicagoans dish out activism



By Blake Deppe

Backed by advocacy group Food & Water Watch and fueled by a demand for health and transparency, residents took to the streets to support the Genetically Engineered Food Labeling Act. They encouraged state Sen. Donne Trotter to do the same, as that legislation would require the Food and Drug Administration to label genetically engineered foods, thus granting people their right to know what they're eating and how it is produced.

To that end, Chicagoans on the city's south side delivered hundreds of petitions they had collected over the past few weeks, plus a coalition letter of 30 small businesses and other local groups in or near Trotter's district. It's the latest support for the bill also known as SB 734, which currently has 20 senate co-sponsors and community backing from groups including the Sierra Club, the Illinois Public Health Association, and the Illinois Farmers Union. Food & Water Watch has joined the fight in keeping with their tradition of ensuring safety, accessibility, and sustainability of food and water, and consumers are now taking charge with their support.

This development in the battle for GMO (genetically modified organism) accountability comes on the heels of a call for reform on the local level, in which the Illinois Public Interest Research Group Education Fund (PIRG) issued an open letter calling

on Jewel-Osco grocery stores to label its store brand products for GMO ingredients.

There are many reasons to be concerned about GMO foods. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN has warned that some 75 percent of plant genetic diversity has been lost as farmers turn to genetically uniform, mass-produced crop varieties. Because GMOs usually don't undergo safety testing before they're brought to market, many consumers are worried about their long-term impact. Further, some GMOs are designed for increased pesticide use, which has been linked to serious health and environmental affects.

Food & Water Watch was amongst the local groups who endorsed the open letter, of which there were 31. Included were such groups as the Southeast Environmental Task Force, who have been at the forefront of the fight in south Chicago against harmful piles of petcoke that are causing health issues, and the IL Farmers Union, which has supported SB 734. It was also endorsed by 13 national organizations.

"As a citizen, I want the politicians that I help elect to stand up for my rights," said activist Erik Malone. "I hope Senator Trotter heard us and chooses to give folks that live here a say in what they are purchasing by labeling GMOs."

Chicagoans on the city's south side, a coalition letter of 30 small businesses, and local groups delivered hundreds of petitions.

Chicago's mayoral election: A tale of two cities

By Shelby Richardson

As the supporters of the Jesus Chuy Garcia campaign gathered at the Alhambra Palace here after the elections in February it had become clear that not only had a run-off against Mayor Emanuel been achieved in the primary but that he had obtained almost 34 percent of the vote. It was the first time an incumbent had been forced into a run-off in Chicago and there was a feeling of coming victory.

Chuy was developing a narrative of Chicago as a tale of two cities, one of a gleaming downtown, the other of neighborhoods being neglected.

It is a city where the rich corporations are not paying their fair share of taxes and the poor are being fleeced through red light traffic schemes to raise revenues on the backs of working class people.

It is a city that closed 50 schools mainly in Black and Latino neighborhoods by fiat. Yet, the next day following that February primary, the issue in the media became: What is Chuy's financial plan? Did he have the skill to manage a city budget?

The question of finances and managing the budget would not go away for Chuy, but the same concern was not raised about the horrible financial condition of the city under Emanuel's leadership.

In the run-off election Emanuel won 64 percent of the white vote, 57% of the Black vote and 39% of the Latino vote. He was able to increase his Black vote by 14.5%, the white vote by 11.25%.

This election deserves serious study by progressive forces. Among the most important question to solve is how to interest the over 50% of people who don't vote.

Cumbre de Las Americas -Venezuela

CubaDebate

Al intervenir en la VII Cumbre de las Américas, que se efectúa en Panamá, el mandatario venezolano calificó esa medida como indignante y peligrosa, y reiteró que constituye la más grave agresión proferida contra su país en 200 años.

Traigo más de 10 millones de firmas de compatriotas que repudian esa orden. Vengo en nombre de 30 millones de venezolanos, dijo, y recordó el amplio respaldo internacional a la campaña contra el decreto.

Ante los jefes de Estado y Gobiernos, y altos representantes de las 35 naciones americanas, reiteró la disposición de su gobierno a dialogar con el presidente Obama sobre este y otros problemas y encontrar soluciones pacíficas.

Para lograrlo, afirmó, la elite de Estados Unidos debe corregir el error de origen de este decreto: "creer que con la muerte de Hugo Chávez la revolución bolivariana se acabaría".

Es es mi primer planteamiento, el reconocimiento de la existencia de la revolución bolivariana, apuntó.

Expresó también la necesidad de derogar la medida por las vías diplomáticas o políticas que se encuentren, y desmontar la maquinaria de guerra económica, política y psicológica instalada en la embajada de Estados Unidos en Venezuela.

En cuanto lugar, dijo, Estados Unidos debe tomar las medias legales para detener la conspiración que se desarrolla desde el territorio norteamericano de Miami, y recordó que el decreto para el intento de golpe de febrero de 2014 en Venezuela se dictó desde la ciudad de Nueva York.

Le tiendo mi mano, señor Obama, para que hablemos y resolvamos en paz los asuntos que tengamos que resolver, sin intervenciones, acotó.

Maduro recordó la masacre de El Chorrillo, en Panamá, en 1988, y afirmó que cumpliría su promesa de hacer llegar al mandatario estadounidense (en ese momento ausente de la sala) una carta de las víctimas de esa masacre.

En la misiva, esos afectados demandan que Estados Unidos pida perdón a Panamá y al mundo por la agresión, y reclaman la indemnización para los familiares de los más de cuatro mil muertos por causa de la invasión de las tropas estadounidenses, dijo.

Denunció que, desde su inicio, la revolución bolivariana enfrenta una campaña de difamación contra sus líderes por oponerse a las políticas guerrilleras de gobiernos estadounidenses.

Muchas cosas han cambiado, el presidente Obama no es George W. Bush; sería un error "inusual y extraordinario" afirmarlo, expresó usando los calificativos con los que Estados Unidos define a Venezuela como una amenaza, por lo que reiteró su disposición al diálogo.

Al finalizar su intervención, expresó la esperanza que en la próxima reunión hemisférica estos problemas se hayan solucionado.

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