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Chicago to pay reparations to police torture victims

By Don Babwin

Victims of police torture under former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge would share \$5.5 million, receive an apology and see their story taught in school under a reparations package proposed Tuesday that city leaders hope will help close one of the most shameful chapters in Chicago's history.

More than 100 people who have accused Burge and officers under his command of shocking them with cattle prods, beating them with phone books and suffocating them with bags until they gave false confessions over nearly two decades ending in 1991. While some have already settled for thousands or millions of dollars, the dozens left can each receive up to \$100,000 under the proposed ordinance.

"My goal is to both close this book - the Burge book - on the city's history, close it and bring closure for the victims and make sure that we take this as a city and learn from it about what we have to do going forward because a police department is about public safety, community policing and building trust," Mayor Rahm Emanuel said.

Amnesty International USA applauded the proposal, which it said was unlike anything a U.S. municipality has ever crafted. "Calling it 'reparations' is itself momentous, and the spectrum of



what is being presented - restitution, compensation and rehabilitation - is unprecedented," said Jasmine Heiss, a senior campaigner for the organization.

The \$5.5 million adds yet more money to more than \$100 million that has been paid in court-ordered judgments, settlements of lawsuits and legal fees - most of it spent by the financially strapped city of Chicago and some by Cook County - over the years. And while the \$100,000 maxi-

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mum payment per victim is a fraction of some previous settlements, an alderman who co-sponsored the ordinance said for many victims this was the best they could hope for.

"While it is not perfect, it is a form of closure that each person would be able to get \$100,000

The proposal is scheduled to be introduced and is widely expected to pass when it returns to the council next month for a vote.

and that is a meaningful settlement,” said Howard Brookins, chairman of the council’s black caucus, who proposed several months ago that a \$20 million fund be set up for torture victims.

Attorney Joey Mogul, of the People’s Law Office and co-founder of the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials, said the “historic” settlement is a compromise that “takes into account” the city’s difficult financial situation.

At the same time, the city took steps to make sure what Burge and his infamous “midnight crew” did to suspects - most of them African-American - to extract confessions is not forgotten.

Besides a provision that calls for teaching about the Burge torture cases to 8th graders and 10th graders in public school history classes, the ordinance would include a formal apology from the City Council, psychological counseling and other benefits such as free tuition at city community colleges. And in recognition that the torture, and in many cases wrongful convictions and lengthy prison sentences, affected both the victims and their families, the ordinance would extend some benefits to victims’ children or grand-

children.

Darrell Cannon - who told of having a shotgun shoved in his mouth and having his genitals shocked by a cattle prod by Burge’s men to confess to a killing he did not commit - said while the amount he would receive under the settlement is not nearly enough, he was proud of being a part of history.

“For those of us who have been fighting and struggling to set a landmark, this is that landmark,” said Cannon, who was freed after 24 years in prison when a review board determined that evidence against him was tainted. “This is the moment. What we do here will not be undone. People across the country will talk about Chicago.”

Burge, 67, was fired from the Chicago Police Department in 1993. He was never criminally charged with torture, but was convicted in 2010 of lying about torture in a civil case and served 4 ½ years in federal custody. Still drawing his pension, he was released from a Florida halfway house.



Don Babwin reports for The Associated Press.

New rules could add millions of workers to overtime pay eligibility

By Mark Gruenberg

At the direction of President Obama, the Labor Department is readying proposed rules - probably to be unveiled within a month - to greatly expand who can get overtime pay. Obama asked DOL to tackle overtime pay in March 2014.

The proposals are now under White House review before DOL unveils them, said Betsey Stevenson, a member of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers. They could add millions of people to the rolls of workers eligible for overtime pay.

DOL wants to broaden overtime eligibility by both raising the pay cap beyond which a worker cannot get overtime and by making salaried workers - not just hourly workers - eligible to get overtime, too, she told a Politico [a political journalism organization that covers the issues, ideas and personalities behind U.S. politics and policy] panel on labor and the future economy on May 6.

Lifting the overtime pay cap and extending overtime to hourly workers “will help a lot of

workers who are in the middle of the wage scale,” said another panelist, Jared Bernstein, a former top EPI economist and a first-term economic advisor to Vice President Joe Biden.

Raising the minimum wage, a plan that labor, Obama and congressional Democrats all back, is an obvious way to aid low-income workers, Bernstein said. “But it’s tricky to think of policies that would help raise the median wage,” Bernstein added.

Stevenson said the overtime pay plan is part of Obama’s agenda of raising the pay for all workers. But she admitted that just raising pay is not enough.

Median compensation includes not just pay, but benefits such as paid sick leave, vacation time, health insurance and pensions. Forty-year median compensation figures were not on DOL or Census Bureau websites, but median hourly pay for non-management workers peaked in 1973 at \$22.41, adjusted for inflation. Last year, it was \$20.67.

Lifting and extending the overtime pay cap will help a lot of workers.

Nuclear fallout, plastics mark human impact on planet, scientists say

By Susan Webb

Plastics was the one-word career advice Dustin Hoffman's character famously received in the 1967 film "The Graduate."

The film heralded a new social era under way in America. But plastics and their technology twin, nuclear weapons, both going into mass production in the post-World War II years, actually marked a new planetary era that has put us all in a test tube, scientists say. Geological remains of the advent of nuclear weapons and mass industrial production of plastics in 1945-1950 mark the start of the era of human impact on our planet, they suggest. A growing number of geologists who study the history of the Earth have been saying that we have entered a new geological era known as the Anthropocene, in which human action is changing the physical world around us. In a column earlier this year, New York Times science writer Andrew Revkin called this new "geological age of our own making" a real-life "experiment well under way, and we're all in the test tube."

Now, Revkin reported, 26 members of an international scientific working group on the topic, in a paper published in January, point "roughly to 1950 as the starting point, indicated by a variety of markers, including the global spread of carbon isotopes from nuclear weapon detonations starting in 1945 and the mass production and disposal of plastics."



But, he said, the working group members suggest that "the key turning point happened in the mid-twentieth century. This was when humans did not just leave traces of their actions, but began to alter the whole Earth system. There was a 'Great Acceleration' of population, of carbon emissions, of species invasions and extinctions, of earth moving, of the production of concrete, plastics and metals.

"The proposal is that the beginning of the Anthropocene could be considered to be drawn at the moment of detonation of the world's first nuclear test: on July 16th 1945."

The scientists base this finding on studies of the boundaries that show up in rocks and soil between "humanly modified ground" and natural geological deposits.

Nuclear weapons and plastics are perhaps the most controversial products of modern science. Their harmful impacts on human life range from the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to toxins in our air, water and soil. Now, we see that they are changing the Earth itself, and we don't know what the long-term consequences will be.

Zalasiewicz commented, "We have to become wise enough to manage the changes that we're creating."

A growing number of geologists who study the history of the Earth have been saying that human action is changing the physical world around us.

Immigrant rights, anti-police brutality groups unite for May 1

By Jim Lane

The progressive movement here broke new ground on May 1. I was at City Hall with the immigrants rights group organized by Texas Organizing Project and several boosters, including the Dallas AFL-CIO. At the other end of downtown, Mothers Against Police Brutality and their supporters began with a rally at the Lew Sterrett jail. Several important developments had converged on that day:

- 1) The Texas Legislature is considering all manner of anti-immigrant maneuvers even while the federal government is trying to honor President Obama's order to ease off on deportations.
- 2) Police brutality has been a big issue here for several years and the local group has established ties far and wide as the anti-brutality movement grows in the nation.
- 3) International Workers Day is finally gaining some traction in its home country.
- 4) May 5/Cinco de Mayo is a Mexican holiday celebrating the fight against European imperialism.

The organizers were apparently aware of the good old American slogan, "Black, Brown, and White, Unite and Fight!" They had set up a rendezvous and a joint march under the combined slogan of "March for Justice!"

Instead of being atomized the way we usually are in my town, we were solidly united together! One of the speakers in the park called it "Capitalism's worst nightmare!"

Raúl en Italia: "Contento y satisfecho con esta visita"

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Durante una escala técnica en la capital italiana, que duró poco menos de 24 horas, el presidente Raúl Castro Ruz aprovechó su estancia aquí para reunirse con el Papa Francisco y el primer ministro italiano Matteo Renzi, encuentros que, según sus declaraciones a la prensa, lo hicieron sentirse contento y satisfecho.

El Sumo Pontífice de la Iglesia Católica y el mandatario cubano intercambiaron por vez primera de manera personal en la mañana del domingo en la Ciudad del Vaticano, en un encuentro privado que duró casi una hora. Al terminar la reunión, Raúl comentó a la prensa que había tenido "una magnífica conversación con el Santo Padre, estoy muy contento y le vine a agradecer lo que hizo para empezar a resolver los problemas entre Estados Unidos y Cuba".

El Presidente cubano había arribado justo a las 9 y 30 de la mañana al aula Pablo VI, lugar donde se realizó la reunión y en cuyas puertas estaba apostada una gran cantidad de periodistas, que desde temprano esperaban su llegada. Raúl fue recibido allí por el prefecto de la Casa Pontificia monseñor Georg Ganswein y después se encontró con el Papa Francisco en su estudio privado.

Luego, ambos dignatarios pasaron a un salón contiguo y saludaron a las respectivas delegaciones, momento en el que Raúl obsequió al Santo Padre una pintura del artista de la plástica Alexis Leyva Machado, titulada Milagro, obra motivada en el fenómeno de la emigración que, a decir de su autor, es la esclavitud de estos tiempos. Por su parte, el Papa

regaló al General de Ejército la moneda conmemorativa por el segundo año de su Pontificado y el Evangelio de la Alegría.

La prensa local señaló lo extraordinario del tiempo de duración del diálogo, así como el día escogido, pues no es habitual que este tipo de recibimientos se realicen los domingos.

Antes de partir hacia la nación caribeña, luego de su encuentro con el primer ministro italiano Matteo Renzi, Raúl volvió a retomar el tema de su visita a la Ciudad del Vaticano y dijo que había tenido una agradable conversación con el Papa, de la cual salió impresionado por su sabiduría y modestia. Recordó sus estudios en un colegio jesuita y aseguró que irá con satisfacción a todas las misas que el Santo Padre oficiará en su próximo viaje a la Isla, en septiembre.

Como una nueva página en las relaciones entre Cuba e Italia, calificó el primer ministro de esa nación, Matteo Renzi, su encuentro con el presidente de Cuba este domingo en el Palacio de Gobierno, tras el cual ambos ofrecieron declaraciones a los medios de prensa.

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