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Thousands rally at N.C. Moral Monday protest



By John Wojcik

Thousands staged a silent protest at the Capitol in Raleigh to kick off the second year of “Moral Mondays,” but vowed that they will never again be quieted.

They demonstrated in open defiance of rules Republicans enacted last week to restrict protests in the legislative building. Row after row of people, in protest against the new rules, marched with tape over their mouths into the legislative building. Republicans passed restrictive laws last week that forbid demonstrators, among other things, from speaking any louder than in conversational tone, holding signs that “disturb” legislators and staff, singing and even clapping.

The message of the defiant marchers yesterday was simple: Rules curbing democracy will not silence protests against the legislative actions of the right wing Republicans who have seized power in North Carolina.

Led by members of the North Carolina NAACP, the protesters demanded that lawmakers roll back many of the repressive laws they passed in the last session. Top on that list was what is generally considered the most repressive voter suppression law in the nation.

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, president of the North Carolina NAACP and architect of the Forward Together Moral Movement said, in a phone

interview today, that “the legislators know why they did this, they know why they are trying to take away the right to vote in this state, it’s all about demographics.”

Barber explained that 25 percent of the voters in North Carolina are African-American and 3 percent are Latino. “That comes to 28 percent,” he said. “If you get just 22 percent of the white voters to vote their futures rather than their fears you have the new electorate the reactionaries fear

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all over the South. These new demographics will change the center of political gravity in North Carolina and all over the South and this is what these legislators are trying to stop.”

“They claim they want voter ID cards so there will be integrity in the process yet they don’t want

The law eliminates same day registration and slashed early voting.

any integrity when it comes to the people keeping an eye on them. They pass tyrannical laws that try to crush the peoples rights.”

The new voter repression law Barber is fighting not only requires ID that hundreds of thousands don't have but eliminates same day registration, slashed early voting days and ends pre-registration of young voters.

While the Moral Monday marchers were at the legislative building yesterday lawyers were entering the state courthouse filing a brief that would put most of the repressive measures in the new law on hold until courts can review a full challenge that is underway. If their plea is granted North Carolina will have to carry out the 2014 midterm elections under the same laws that applied before the passage of the repressive law during the last legislative session. If the plea filed yesterday is granted the election will have to be carried out under the same rules that were in place in 2012 and 2008.

“In the face of the overwhelming evidence that the purpose of the new law is to disenfran-

chise minorities this is the only way,” said Denise Lieberman, senior attorney for the Advancement Project, which officially entered the plea.

Barber was asked whether there was still time for civil rights, pro-labor and progressive forces to actually make any headway in the current 2014 legislative elections by removing some of the extremists who backed the repressive legislation.

“We are going to see the most massive registration drives in history happen here this summer,” he said “In this Freedom Summer there will be a massive effort in 50 counties across this state to increase and grow the number of people eligible to vote. We will not be deterred on this and one should never underestimate the power of the mass movement when it is driven by strong moral concerns - even on this latest tyrannical effort to crush demonstrations the movement compelled some Republicans to join in with Democrats against the measure.”



John Wojcik is the co-editor of Peoplesworld.org.

Who is to blame for the crisis at the VA?

By PW Editorial

Once again the American people are being treated to a disgusting display of hypocrisy. This time health care for our veterans is the political football.

Fox News, Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell and others are suddenly concerned about alleged cooking of the books at Veterans Administration hospitals - trying to make it look like wait times for vets in need of care are shorter than they actually are.

They've coupled their "concern" with demands that Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki resign and with new attacks on the "incompetent" Obama administration, which they accuse of renegeing on its commitment to good care for veterans. U.S. Senate Republicans blocked legislation 11 weeks ago that would have expanded federal health care and education programs for veterans. Mitch McConnell and his gang on Capitol Hill said that \$24 billion cost of the expansion of care for veterans would bust the budget. Neither of these gentlemen, nor Fox news, nor any of the

others most outraged by the problems at the VA were at all concerned, however about budget busting or dry ink when they systematically approved spending bills for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that we now know totaled more than \$6 trillion dollars. The spend fest in Afghanistan continues today. The truth is the VA was not equipped to deal with the aftermath of two multi-trillion dollar land wars. To deal with the aftermath properly the agency has to be modernized and beefed up and given far more, not fewer resources. Despite this reality, however, the Obama administration has actually presided over some improvements in the process for getting veterans into the health system. The VA has tried to meet some of these needs with new outpatient clinics and a program to reduce homelessness among vets.

None of this is to diminish the importance of clearing up the problems at the VA. Anything it takes, up to and including performance hearings, investigations and even dismissal needs to be considered.

Republicans are guilty of gross hypocrisy when it comes to supporting vets.

Ohio group says reinvest in higher education

By Matt Ides

Ending student debt, increasing state funding and guaranteeing rights for adjunct lecturers brought nearly 100 supporters of higher education policy reform to the Ohio Statehouse this week.

Organized by the Ohio Higher Education Coalition (OHEC), a coalition representing students, parents, and faculty, the May 13 gathering featured six speakers, visits to state legislators and discussions about solutions to current problems in higher education.

Flanked by students with signs that read, “End Student Debt,” Kaila Riel of the Ohio Student Association spoke about her experiences as a working student. Riel, a student at The Ohio State University, talked about the increasing difficulties working students face while tuition costs rise and income stays stagnant. As a result of her experiences, Riel was driven to take action for change. “I don’t want to leave anybody behind due to something as trivial as their socio-economic status,” she said.

“We have to make college affordable because of the economic benefits for the state,” said Marcia Futel, a Parents for Public Schools board member in Cincinnati. “Having a college education increases Ohio’s ability to compete with other states and countries, but we can’t leave our youth with a debt so great they can’t buy a house or car because of high student loan payments,” she said.

“Ohioans deserve responsible budgeting that will provide more support for higher education and reduce the out-of-pocket expenses for our students,” said John McNay, Ohio Chapter AAUP (American Association of University Professors) president. “We all agree that having a more educated workforce benefits Ohio, but that won’t happen as long as state leaders condone a system of minimal state funding that leaves students taking on tremendous risk.”

Andrew Bonthius, an adjunct professor at



Cuyahoga Community College and a member of the organizing committee of the Ohio Part-Time Faculty Association, discussed the critical labor provided by adjunct faculty, although their rights as state employees are disregarded. Adjuncts are part-time, temporary faculty, who were once a minority in the higher education labor force. But today they teach the majority of classes at many of our public institutions, the Cleveland resident said. “Adjunct faculty are now the new faculty majority providing critical quality instruction at most institutions, but we are treated and paid as a casual workforce.”

Breakout discussion sessions and legislative visits followed the press conference. Participants in the breakout sessions discussed lowering interest rates on student loans and moving towards a system of Ohio-based grants to keep students and their future economic successes in Ohio. Bargaining rights, greater inclusion and professional development opportunities were some of the solutions discussed in addressing the issues of part-time or adjunct faculty.

The Ohio Higher Education Coalition members include Ohio Student Association, Ohio Education Association, Ohio Federation of Teachers, Ohio Chapter AAUP, Ohio Part-Time Faculty Association, and New Faculty Majority.

Bargaining rights, greater inclusion, and ending student debt are seen as crucial demands.

Portland, Oregon dumps Walmart bonds

By PAI

Cheered on by OURWalmart - the group of Walmart workers who campaign for better wages and working conditions nationwide at the monster retailer - and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the Portland, Ore., City Council voted May 15 to dump Walmart.

The council instructed the city Treasurer to get rid of \$9 million worth of Walmart bonds in its investment portfolio that just matured and to dump the remaining bonds when they mature, too. That's another \$27 million in bonds, the last of which matures in April 2016.

City Commissioner Steve Novick's resolution also bans any future Walmart bond buys. The legislation makes Oregon's largest city a leader in putting its money where its mouth is, by ridding itself of securities in a firm known for its low prices, rock-bottom wages, bad benefits and rampant labor law-breaking. Novick says it's the first city to do so.

"From what I can tell, no other U.S. city has looked at socially responsible investing in quite the same way as Portland," he told a May 15 press conference. "I'm hopeful other cities and states take note and adopt similar investment principles to hold companies accountable and align our investment policies with our values."

Portland's investments average \$1.1 billion yearly, so Walmart is approximately 3 percent of that total.

Sierra y tierra: El racismo se respira

Por Javier Sierra

Durante décadas, el movimiento de justicia medioambiental ha defendido que la contaminación es una forma más de racismo. Ahora, un estudio de la Universidad de Minnesota contundentemente prueba con datos y cifras esta la dolorosa realidad.

El reporte concluye que, más que cualquier otro, la raza es el factor determinante en los niveles de contaminación a los que está expuesta cualquier comunidad del país. Los investigadores llegaron a la conclusión que las minorías étnicas respiran un 46% más de dióxido de nitrógeno (NO₂)—una sustancia tóxica procedente de la combustión del carbón y el petróleo— que los blancos no hispanos. Y lo que es más preocupante para los hispanos: nosotros estamos entre las comunidades que peor aire respiran. "Esto es terrible", dice Kim Wasserman-Nieto, ganadora del Goldman Prize, el "Nóbel" de la ecología, y héroe de la justicia medioambiental. "Estas son las realidades a las que se enfrenta nuestra comunidad cada día. Y la situación no mejora. Somos los que menos contaminación generamos y los que más sufrimos su impacto". El NO₂ —el cual causa asma, otras enfermedades respiratorias y males cardíacos— se mide en partes por millón (ppm). Entre los blancos no hispanos, la exposición es de 9.9 ppm. Entre nosotros es de 15.6 ppm y entre los hispanos negros de 17.4 ppm, la más alta.

Wasserman-Nieto, también di-

rectora de organización y estrategia de LVEJO, el grupo de justicia medioambiental en el Sur de Chicago que lleva años peleando contra los contaminadores, indica que el estudio deja claro los costos reales del carbón y el petróleo.

"Nuestras comunidades están empezando a darse cuenta de la verdadera gravedad de este problema", dice. "Ya estamos viendo evidencia concreta de cómo la industria de los combustibles fósiles está impactando a nuestra gente". El estudio descubre también algo que Wasserman-Nieto califica de "astronómico". Al comparar blancos de bajos ingresos con hispanos de altos ingresos, éstos resultaron estar expuestos a mayores niveles de NO₂.

"Tuve que leer esa frase tres o cuatro veces porque no me lo podía creer", dice. "¿A dónde vamos a ir? La calidad del aire es igualmente horrible en todas nuestras comunidades".

La razón, explican los autores, radica en el hecho de que los norteamericanos tienden a vivir agrupados según su condición étnica, y en nuestros barrios estamos todos mucho más expuestos a altos niveles de NO₂. Otro factor importante es la proximidad de nuestros hogares a las autopistas, lo que Wasserman-Nieto llama "corredores tóxicos", ya que la gasolina y el diésel son las mayores fuentes de NO₂.

Ese sería un gran paso para acabar con este racismo que se respira.

Javier Sierra es columnista del Sierra Club.

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