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Retirees organize for social justice



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More than 500 retiree activists from across the country gathered in Las Vegas last month to discuss issues of social and economic justice at the annual membership convention of the Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA). The ARA has over 4.3 million members including retired union members and other retirees.

Themed “Building Retiree Power,” the convention focused on wealth and income inequality and preserving Americans’ right to a secure retirement. Attendees connected with other activists, heard from leaders in the labor movement and elected officials, attended action-focused workshops, and adopted resolutions on issues important to current and future retirees.

Secretary-Treasurer Ruben Burks focused on the widening income gap in America and reminded attendees about the critical role the labor movement played in expanding retirement security. “If it were not for the labor movement, there would be no Social Security or Medicare,” said Burks. “It was only through our collective bargaining rights and our political strength that we were able to make these things happen.”

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) President Lee Saunders called attention to continuing attacks on

worker pensions and called for a fight to expand pension coverage to more Americans. “Together we must continue to stand up for the idea that after a lifetime of working hard and playing by the rules, we all deserve to live out our years with the dignity and respect that comes from financial independence.” He said, “The question is not, ‘Why do you still have pensions?’ but ‘Why don’t all workers have pensions?’”

Retired activists discussed how to stop ef-

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forts to cut Medicare and Social Security, raise the minimum wage, and fight back against destructive trade deals like the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Of keen interest was information involving the secretive American Legislative Exchange

The convention focused on wealth and income inequality and the right to a secure retirement.

Council (ALEC), a shadowy organization that connects corporations with state lawmakers to quietly push an anti-worker agenda at the state and local level. ALEC brings together corporations and their lobbyists and legislators to vote as equals on “model bills” that protect profits at the expense of retirees and workers. Legislators who are wined and dined with corporate money introduce identical model bills in their state legislatures and too often are successful at passing legislation that harms working families and retirees.

Delegates adopted resolutions to improve and expand Social Security benefits; for Wall Street to pay its fair share of taxes; against corporate attacks on post-retirement healthcare; to oppose ALEC’s corrupt agenda and to support a campaign to inform the public about ALEC and ALEC politicians.

The Alliance also launched its “Medicare Turns 50” campaign, calling attention to Medicare’s 50th anniversary next year - July 30th 2015 - as an ideal opportunity to educate Americans on the merits and successes of the Medicare program. The Alliance will celebrate Medicare as America’s most successful health care program and empha-

size its 50-year history of giving seniors the ability to see a doctor and fill a prescription - benefits that keep millions of Americans out of poverty. As members of Congress like Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) hone in on dismantling the Medicare program and giving more power to Big Pharma and health care corporations, retiree activists will spend the next year organizing grassroots events nationwide, placing letters in their local papers, and calling attention to Medicare’s successful track record. Retiree leaders in the Alliance have seen over their lifetimes the rise in income inequality and its stronghold on the middle class. They have seen the increasing difficulty Americans have saving for retirement, to the point where many are simply not doing it. Making the problem worse, out-of-touch politicians continue to back proposals to break down the Medicare and Social Security systems - changes Alliance members say will only make the retirement security crisis worse.

In a tough political environment, the Alliance’s active retirees are preparing to utilize their experience and willpower to continue the fight for retirement security.

CPUSA examines challenges facing the nation

By John Wojcik

Civil rights activists during the 1960’s, Vietnam War opponents busy during the 1970’s, anti-nuke demonstrators from the 1980’s, opponents of the first war in Iraq in the 1990’s and fast food workers of today were among those sitting side by side for three days at the 30th National Convention of the CPUSA here June 13-15.

What they were all doing, however, is what the delegates said was the most important thing: Turning the attention of the party to the movements it sees as critical to changing U.S. politics, economics and popular thinking.

“We are looking ahead,” said the party’s outgoing chairman Sam Webb during his keynote speech, “but not so far ahead that we miss the challenge of this fall’s elections. And of course, our attention will turn to the many-sided building of a 21st century party. Such a party, which we are building, should be modern, mature, militant and mass - or in my word a 4M party.”

John Bachtell, the party’s newly-elected na-

tional chair, said there is a “huge upsurge going on and this presents a challenge and great opportunity for our party. We want to be a major part of shaping and building this upsurge. Every day we see another protest - immigrants, Walmart workers, fast food workers, the fight for a higher minimum wage, Moral Mondays, resistance to voter suppression, the fight against mass incarceration, the Keystone XL Pipeline, the fight for women’s reproductive health, students struggling over debt, the AFL-CIO opening itself up to all kinds of allied movements, the election of anti-corporate mayors in New York and Newark - the list goes on.”

The convention was arguably the most open in the party’s history. Convention delegates unanimously agreed that the struggles to raise wages at Walmart and other low wage retailers should become a strategic focal point for the CPUSA in the coming period. “Walmart and other low wage retailers, as they rake in huge profits, are meeting resistance to their practices,” said Bachtell.

Delegates agreed raising wages at Walmart and other retailers should become a strategic focal point.

Lawsuit wins groundbreaking immigration policy

By Joelle Fishman

After years of organizing against racist profiling by the East Haven Police Department, including several large immigrant rights marches and intervention by the U.S. Department of Justice, a landmark legal victory has been won. Civil rights plaintiffs in *Chacón v. East Haven Police Department* today announced a groundbreaking settlement with the town of East Haven. The town will pay plaintiffs \$450,000 and has agreed to adopt a new wide-ranging policy, Policy 428.2, which limits the police department's involvement in enforcement of civil immigration laws. It makes East Haven the first jurisdiction in Connecticut to decline to enforce any immigration detainers.

"With this settlement, East Haven has now adopted some of the strictest constraints on immigration enforcement of any city or town in the nation," said law professor Michael Wishnie of the Worker & Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic at Yale Law School, co-counsel in the case. The town's police department, he said, "has agreed to limit questioning of persons about immigration status, enforcement of immigration detainers, making arrests based solely on violations of civil immigration law, and communicating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)." When four members of the East Haven police force were arrested in 2012 as part of a federal probe into abuse of immigrant residents and shopkeepers, public outcry forced Police Chief Leonard Gallo to resign. In pursuit of dignity, justice and respect the organization Community of Immigrants in East Haven was formed and organized a large, peaceful march to end the violence against Latinos that had resulted in the probe. Settlement discussions began in the fall of 2013 after the criminal prosecutions of the four former East Haven police officers had concluded. Today's settlement agreement is the culmination of a civil rights lawsuit



filed in 2010 in response to repeated abuses committed by East Haven police officers against Latino East Haven residents, including false arrest, assault, battery, discrimination, illegal search and seizure, and obstruction of justice, among other harms. "We are very happy to be finished with this long struggle for the recognition of our rights, and look forward to moving on with our lives," said Marcía Chacón, an East Haven business owner and a plaintiff in the case. "My husband and I run a law-abiding small business and will continue to do so. We strongly believe that this settlement will be good for the town and other business owners like us. I am thankful that this aspect of our work to reform the culture of the East Haven Police Department was successfully concluded," said Fr. James Manship, another plaintiff in the suit.

"My sincere hope is that once the Department of Justice finishes their formal relationship with the East Haven Police Department that the whole community will have a department very different than the one we had when we began this process."

"The plaintiffs in this case are ordinary people with extraordinary courage, and it was their good fortune, and mine, to work with a group of extraordinary law students from Yale who assisted in the settlement," said David Rosen, lead counsel for plaintiffs.

The settlement limits police involvement in enforcement of immigration laws.

Texas Republicans jump back in time

By Jim Lane

The GOP held its statewide convention here June 6-8 in the only major city they can still carry in statewide elections. It was the largest almost-all-white political gathering of its size in recent times. Advocates of “open-carry” rallied outside with AR-15 assault rifles. Inside, more reactionary events occurred.

According to press reports, the Republicans compared immigrants to terrorists in that they should not be negotiated with at all. No path to citizenship, which they call “amnesty,” should be allowed. Instead, the state should fence off the 1,500-mile border with Mexico. They want to end the in-state college tuition rates for which the children of undocumented immigrants are now eligible and they want Texas police to be allowed to question the citizenship of anyone.

Gays, according to the Republicans, have voluntarily chosen their sexual orientation and should be encouraged by the state to take “reparative therapy” deprogramming to become heterosexuals. The Log Cabin Republicans, a gay organization supporting Republicans, was banned from having a booth.

According to the Texas GOP, home-schooling should be encouraged and reduction of funding for all public schooling should continue. Regressive property taxes should be abolished in favor of even-more-regressive sales taxes. The state lottery benefiting education should be abolished. Governor Rick Perry, who used to be considered the most rabid reactionary in the nation, came in fourth in the straw poll for presidential nominees.

San Francisco votará por \$15 como salario mínimo

Por Mark Gruenberg

Luego de un acuerdo celebrado el 10 de junio entre sindicatos, grupos comunitarios, empresas y líderes políticos locales, San Francisco votará en noviembre sobre si se debe aumentar gradualmente el salario mínimo en toda la ciudad a \$15 la hora.

Si lo aprueban, esta ciudad de California se sumará a su propio suburbio de Richmond, además de Seattle y Sea-Tac en Washington, como los únicos municipios con el mínimo de \$15. San Francisco llegará a esa cifra en 2018, más pronto que Seattle, según el acuerdo alcanzado.

El acuerdo de San Francisco es parte de un movimiento a nivel nacional para aumentar el salario mínimo el cual decidió no esperar a que los legisladores disfuncionales en la capital lo hagan efectivo para todos los EE.UU. El mínimo federal de 7,25 dólares la hora no ha sido aumentado desde la administración republicana de Bush.

El Presidente Obama, los demócratas del Congreso, sindicatos, grupos comunitarios y organizaciones religiosas han estado en campaña para promover el mínimo de \$10.10 a más tardar para el año 2016. La mayoría republicana en la Cámara de Representantes y aquellos en el Senado dedicados a dilatar esta medida han sido capaces de derrotar esos esfuerzos hasta ahora.

El acuerdo de San Francisco se produjo el mismo día en que el De-

partamento del Trabajo de Obama propuso regulaciones para imponer un mínimo \$10.10 para los empleados de los futuros contratistas federales. Ambos aumentos ayudarían a decenas de miles de trabajadores de bajos ingresos, especialmente a aquellos en la industria de la comida rápida.

“El Consejo Laboral de San Francisco se enorgullece de ser parte de un acuerdo histórico alcanzado ayer con el alcalde y la Junta de Supervisores de San Francisco para poner una moción de salario mínimo consensual en la boleta electoral de noviembre con el fin de otorgar a todos los trabajadores un sueldo mínimo de \$15 en un plazo prudente y sin excepciones en todo el país”, declaró el consejo en un comunicado.

“No fue fácil”, dijo el Director Ejecutivo del Consejo Laboral de San Francisco Tim Hudson con respecto al pacto del referendo sobre el salario mínimo de \$15. “La organización fue difícil, la negociación intensa, pero la coalición demostró ser única, histórica y dedicada; los trabajadores y promotores de la comunidad lucharon por aumentar el poder de los trabajadores de San Francisco.

“Esto fue algo más que un acuerdo para obtener \$15 en la boleta electoral, sino que también cambió la cultura de cómo los sindicatos y las organizaciones comunitarias pueden luchar juntos por la equidad, salarios justos, y una voz en el trabajo. “

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