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Rev. Barber: Voting rights fight is do or die for labor

By Larry Rubin

Speaking here to a group of labor communicators and unionists from across the U.S., Rev. William Barber, president of the North Carolina NAACP and leader of the Forward Together movement, said: “The labor rights movement and the voting rights movement are interconnected. We must be smart enough to hook up. If we do, we can change this nation.”

Barber was the keynote speaker at the 60th convention of the International Labor Communications Association, an organization affiliated with the AFL-CIO, Change to Win and the nation’s Central Labor Councils. Members work for unions as journalists, social media experts, spokespersons, and creators of membership communications.

“The powers-that-be have always tried to split the labor movement from the civil rights movement, but in North Carolina we are going forward together and not taking one step back,” Barber said.

He explained that his NAACP branch and its Forward Together movement have brought together “white, black and brown people, native Americans, labor organizers, civil rights advocates, environmentalists, people fighting for better health care and education, and people fighting for the rights of women and LGBT community.”



Barber has led demonstrations of up to 100,000 people protesting newly passed voter suppression laws and cutbacks in Medicaid and school funding.

He said that the labor movement needs to place top priority in the fight for voting rights because denial of those rights is what makes it possible for labor rights to be dismantled state by state. He said labor spent \$50 million to unseat Scott Walker, the anti-labor governor of Wisconsin.

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sin and said that the same level of commitment if not more is needed now from labor to battle against the attacks on voting rights in the various states. Otherwise, he said, the labor movement is in danger of suffering what could be major additional blows.

If you want our vote, you need to commit to the right to vote.

He sounded a hopeful note, however, regarding developments in his own state.

“White Republicans fed up with attacks on healthcare and hospital closings have been forming NAACP chapters in the hills of North Carolina,” Barber said, and Forward Together organizers have been helping workers organize unions.

He pointed out that ever since the late 1860s, blacks and poor whites in the South have attempted to work together, “which scares the daylight” out of those who want to make sure there is plenty of cheap labor in the South.

To illustrate his point, Barber went back to 1868, during Reconstruction. The North Carolina legislature adopted a new constitution. It both guaranteed African Americans the right to vote and established as a “self-evident, inalienable right” the right of all persons to have “the enjoyment of the fruits of their labor.”

Barber said that blacks and poor whites began building a society based on equality. However, former slave owners could not allow this. “They formed what they called the ‘Redemption’ movement,” Barber said, “which imposed an

agenda of fear, took the right to vote away from black people, passed Jim Crow laws and established segregation.

Tea party people are today’s “Redeemers,” Barber said. “They got scared in 2008 when Obama carried North Carolina, Florida and Virginia.

“So in 2013, the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act and threw back to Congress the job of re-writing it. Congress has done nothing.”

Barber continued, “The day after the Supreme Court decision, the North Carolina legislature began passing laws aimed at making it more difficult for black people, brown people and poor whites to vote.

He exhorted the audience to “take the high road. Let’s build a movement with an agenda for the future, not based on fear.”

He concluded: “Don’t underestimate the power of a movement built by uniting all those who are fighting for justice.”



Larry Rubin is Washington correspondent for PW.

Drought turning Golden State’s redwoods brown

By Blake Deppe

From dried lawns to water shortages to wildfires, California’s drought continues to wreak havoc, and now the state’s sequoias - those ancient trees better known as redwoods - could be the next casualty. For the first time, there are signs of foliage die-back on sequoia seedlings, a rare and worrying prospect.

The truth is that many redwood trees are dying of thirst, according to data collected by the U.S. Geological Survey.

The agency’s ecologist Nate Stephenson hiked into Sequoia National Park’s Giant Forest and found that not only do the younger trees show traces of decay, but some of their older, towering counterparts are browning at the leaves as well. “I’ve been studying sequoias for 35 years or so and have never seen anything like this,” he said. He deployed a research team to traverse the park and the neighboring Kings Canyon to do a more thorough exam and documented a startling pattern.

About half of the 4,300 trees they studied had

lost ten to 50 percent of their foliage, and one in 100 lost more than 50 percent. They are still collecting further data on the trees’ water, sugar, and nitrogen levels to get a better idea of how they will be affected by climate change in the long run.

“One of the big questions is, how much drought can giant sequoias survive?” said Koren Nydick, ecologist and science coordinator for Kings Canyon. “The good news is there were lots of trees that still seem healthy, but there was this smaller amount that seemed to be stressed - and stressed in ways that we haven’t seen documented before in the parks. [It’s] the kind of stress that could eventually kill a tree.”

As experts continue to research how the redwoods are holding up, they are increasingly using technology to do it.

Emily Burns, director of science for the Save the Redwoods League, said, “The worst thing that would happen is we would see these trees dying. But the trees wouldn’t be this big if they hadn’t figured out a way to get water during dry periods.”

Redwood trees are dying of thirst.

Sanders visits University of Chicago

By Patrick J. Foote

Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders made a brief appearance at the University of Chicago on Monday to address the congregated student body in Rockefeller Chapel. The event itself, squeezed between a tight Iowa campaign schedule and a pressing vote in the Senate, was ticketed entry and resulted in a standing room only crowd.

David Axelrod, famed Democratic strategist and now Director of the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago, introduced Sanders by running down his accomplishments.

He noted that Sanders took part in the first sit-in for desegregation of housing at the University of Chicago.

"I think about the many many hours that I spent in the basement of Harper Library reading everything, except books that I was supposed to read for the next day," Sanders shared, arousing knowing giggles from the predominately young crowd.

The first part of the speech was broadly themed around the progress that the United States has made in the areas of women's, LGBT, and civil rights since Sanders' walked for graduation in that very chapel back in 1964. After that brief look backwards, Sanders shifted gears towards talking about his policies for the future in his trademark campaign style: paid family and medical leave, expansion of Medicare,



and the fight for public elections.

"As a result of the disastrous decision in the Citizens United case, the American political system has become totally corrupted," Sanders proclaimed. The gathered mass responded in cheers of affirmation at his use of no uncertain terms.

"I cried. There's plenty of politicians that have made me cry for other reasons," said Katherin Wuthrich, a life long resident of Chicago. She was impressed by Sanders' willingness to take on the fundamental issues like campaign finance reform without a Super PAC to back him up.

"I've been following him ever since the 80s when he worked on Jesse Jackson's campaign," said Carolyn J. Ruff, another long-time resident of Chicago, but she was aware that many in her community have not.

"A lot of white people know who he is, not African Americans. That's why I'm trying to introduce him to the African American community." She went on to say that she hopes that she will be able to get Sanders to address her church congregation at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago.

Ruff hopes that Sanders would begin to expand his campaign schedule into more diverse communities, specifically working class communities of color.

The American political system has become totally corrupted.

Blankenship to finally face justice for 29 miners' deaths?

By John Milam

The accused coal criminal, Don Blankenship, may finally face justice this coming month. Blankenship was the CEO of Massey Energy, which owned the Upper Big Branch Mine at the time when an April 5, 2010 underground explosion killed 29 miners.

Perhaps the defendant had hoped that time would dim the light of public attention from Mr. Blankenship and his alleged crimes but families of those who died have not forgotten and will not let the cause of those workers' deaths remain buried in that dark mine.

There have been so many twists, turns, and delays in this case that some wondered whether Blankenship would ever be made to answer the charges against him. On November 13 of last year a federal grand jury indicted Blankenship on four criminal counts: Conspiracy to violate mandatory mine safety and health standards, Conspiracy to impede mine safety officials, Making false statements to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, and Securities fraud. The safety violations are believed to have caused a build up of highly combustible methane gas, leading to the explosion that killed those miners.

But, with three or four felony counts against Blankenship, it's unlikely that the trial will wrap up in two days either. Whatever the duration of the Blankenship trial, People's World will be there to cover the events as they unfold.

Fin del conflicto cada vez más cerca

Grandma.cu

El Gobierno y las FARC-EP reconocieron que a pesar de los avances quedan puntos importantes en la Agenda para terminar el conflicto definitivamente

El proceso de paz en Colombia ha avanzado como nunca antes en la historia. Así quedó demostrado ayer cuando las delegaciones del Gobierno y de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) anunciaron en una sesión especial a la que asistió el General de Ejército Raúl Castro, Presidente de los Consejos de Estado y de Ministros, el acuerdo logrado en uno de los puntos más importantes de la Agenda, el de reparación de víctimas y justicia.

El hecho fue calificado de trascendental no solo porque es la primera vez que asisten los máximos representantes de ambas partes que dialogan en La Habana desde noviembre del 2012 —el presidente, Juan Manuel Santos y el jefe del Estado Mayor de las FARC-EP, Timoleón Jiménez—; sino también porque demuestra que los colombianos están a un paso más cerca de tener una paz definitiva que destierre el conflicto de décadas en esa nación.

Sin embargo, los representantes de la Mesa de Conversaciones subrayaron que aún quedan asuntos importantes para sellar la paz como la dejación de armas, el cese del fuego y el problema del paramilitarismo, entre otros.

Los representantes del Gobierno y la guerrilla pactaron poner como fecha límite de los diálogos el 23 de marzo del 2016 y hacer todo lo posible por cumplirlo. Detallaron asimismo que el acuerdo obtenido ayer propone un sistema de justicia transicional cuyo centro son las víctimas. En ese sentido, especificaron que la mayoría de los delitos serán amnistiados y que en el caso de los del grado de atrocidades, genocidios, exterminio, secuestros y otros, serán juzgados en un tribunal basado en la búsqueda de la verdad.

A aquellos que admitan su culpa de antemano se les impondrá una justicia restaurativa. La pena para quienes reconozcan su implicación será de cinco a seis años y para quienes no lo hagan, hasta de 20 años.

Las delegaciones presididas por Juan Manuel Santos y por Timoleón Jiménez reconocieron el papel de Cuba y Noruega como garantes del proceso de paz, así como de Chile y Venezuela en su acompañamiento.

Recordaron también las palabras del Papa quien en la misa oficiada en La Habana llamó a “no permitirnos otro fracaso” de las conversaciones de paz para Colombia.

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