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On the trans-pacific partnership, we have to educate

By Mark Gruenberg

A recent poll on the controversial Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) so-called “free trade” pact tells us that workers and our allies have a massive public education job to do.

While asking about the Democratic presidential hopefuls and their issue stands, the Washington Post-ABC News poll reported on Oct. 21 that by a 44 percent-32 percent plurality, the general public supports the TPP. The other quarter of the electorate had no opinion.

More importantly, 51 percent of Democrats back the TPP. The rest were split between opposition and no opinion. Independents favored TPP by 41 percent-35 percent. So did Republicans: 39 percent-37 percent, within the survey’s margin of error.

The Post-ABC poll may be an outlier. If so, it’s a dangerous one. Several months ago, a roundup of surveys compiled by Public Citizen - a worker ally against fast-track and the TPP - showed majorities of up to 2-to-1 against fast-track and specifically against allowing the TPP under it. That ratio was solid for years, ever since a January 2014 union-commissioned poll.

“A May 2015 Reuters/Ipsos poll, for example, found that a majority of the U.S. public supports the concept of ‘new international trade agree-



ments to promote the sale of American goods abroad,” Public Citizen reported. “Who would be opposed to trade deals framed as simply boosting exports?”

“But the poll did not address any elements of the TPP that made the sweeping deal so controversial. It did not ask, for example, whether respondents support ‘new international trade agreements that could offshore U.S. jobs,’ despite widespread concern about the TPP’s incentives for

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U.S. firms to relocate abroad.

“According to Ipsos’ own data from its other May, 2015 trade poll, had the Reuters/Ipsos survey mentioned the TPP’s actual content, the result would have been broad TPP opposition.”

If attitudes have flipped between May and

The public needs to know and understand that the TPP deal will endanger their jobs.

now, especially among Democrats, then workers and their allies have an education job to do. Specifically, we must tell the public the TPP endangers their jobs. We need a factory worker to say how he lost his job to China under prior trade pacts and a call center worker to say how she lost her job because the company could find cheaper labor in the Philippines. Both must say that TPP would produce a rerun.

The public must learn about the secret international trade court TPP would set up, with pro-business lawyers as the judges. They could trash your wage laws, your job safety laws, your Buy American laws and your environmental laws, all in the name of ensuring present and future corporate profits. There's no opposition allowed in such cases, and no appeals, either.

People need to know that when President Obama says worker rights are written into the TPP, he's wrong. The TPP tells its member nations to enforce their own labor laws, but there's little penalty if they don't. That means ordering Vietnam to enforce its minimum wage law - of just over 50 cents a day. That means ordering Brunei

to enforce its anti-discrimination law, which allows rampant discrimination, or worse, against gays. Those are just examples.

People need to know that the TPP protects corporate patents at consumers' expense. Drug firms are screaming because TPP cuts their exclusive patent monopolies on prescription drugs by several years. Monopolists price prescription drugs at \$200 a pop or more. They'd still exist.

We must inform people that the TPP would let South Korean cars deluge the U.S., without tariffs, to compete with U.S.-made cars and U.S. workers.

We must tell the public, in short, why all of us - and our lawmakers-must oppose the TPP.



Gruenberg is the editor of Press Associates Inc.

NYC union pension systems to invest \$150m in affordable city housing

By PAI

Five New York City union pension systems will invest some \$150 million in projects to erect 20,000 units of affordable housing in the Big Apple, the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust (HIT), said.

The money is being sent to the HIT to leverage some \$1 billion in total investment in the housing in all five boroughs, the trust added. Union labor will build the housing in an economically targeted investment program.

Economically targeted investments are designed to address market inefficiencies by providing capital or liquidity to under-served communities and populations across the city, added city Comptroller Scott Stringer, its chief financial officer.

Stringer also advised the union pension systems on the projects. Working with the HIT on investing in housing "is a fiscally smart marriage of resources and housing policy," he added. The investments provide market returns to the pension funds, HIT noted.

The HIT invests in affordable housing, and sometimes other projects, nationwide. All the projects are built totally with union labor. But the new New York investment marks the first phase of a new HIT strategy for investing in the city over the next seven years, Housing Trust chief executive Stephen Coyle said.

The strategy, developed by HIT, union leaders, developers, community groups and Stringer's staff, "aims to preserve the affordability of 12,500 to 15,000 housing units, construct 5,000 to 7,500 new housing units" and to "work with city and state agencies to finance and improve affordable public housing."

HIT estimated the 7-year plan would produce 7,300 union construction jobs, double that number in total jobs and \$1 billion in wages and benefits to workers.

The city and state agencies along with other entities and union leaders are looking to improve affordable public housing.

Activists redecorate LNG pipeline office with clean water signs

By J. E. Johnson

An office for the LNG pipeline project was plastered with clean water and clean environment signs during a demonstration against the LNG project in the southern Oregon town of Medford.

According to Southern Oregon Rising Tide: across Oregon, fossil fuel and pipeline corporations are trying to sell their plans to export fracked gas through communities, forests, and rivers. This fall, activists are turning up the heat and taking direct action to send the message that they won't allow communities to be sacrificed for fossil fuels.

The Medford action took place during the rush hour, only one of many actions taken on a state-wide basis by a dozen different groups. Though the building had been plastered by the signs, the police force in Medford dismissed the idea that the building had been defaced or harmed in any way.

Some of the signs were of trees, "My roots don't eat gas," water and schools of fish "Keep our water clean" and "Leave our riverbed alone!" Some signs expressed the strong opinions of the protesters: "LNG = Climate Crime." A large banner carried by the crowd showed Justice carrying her balance scale with a pile of cash in one balance pan and a beaver (the symbol of Oregon) in the other balance pan.

Oregon Governor Kate Brown has the authority to turn down the building of the frack-gas pipeline,



as the former governor did, and as have the governors of several surrounding states. But the governor is under ferocious economic pressure. For instance, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has recently issued its rubber-stamp approval for the LNG project, as expected for an agency that some say does nothing but approve what industry claims it needs.

A demonstration was unusual business for Medford, a small retirement town of 78,000 in southern Oregon. Its more normal business is the two hospitals that serve the whole region of southern Oregon. Medford is a hundred miles south along the I-5 corridor from Roseburg, where the massacre at Umpqu Community College took place. The killing was described as the largest in the history of Oregon, a false claim, since the genocide of the Native Americans was the largest mass murder in the history of the state.

Activist agree that Oregon does not need more frack-gas and neither does America. Why not save it for future generations? Has the idea of putting things aside for a rainy day become an obsolete idea under capitalism?

Activists are taking action and sending a message that they won't allow communities to be sacrificed for fossil fuels.

Senate rejects bill to discourage “sanctuary cities”

By Larry Rubin

Democrats and one Republican yesterday blocked a bill that would have cut some federal funding from jurisdictions that have “sanctuary city” laws.

Under such laws, local police departments do not cooperate with attempts by the U.S. Immigration agency to deport people. However, they do not block such attempts.

The so-called Stop Sanctuary Policies and Protect Americans Act passed the House in July even after President Obama threatened to veto any such measure. The bill was promoted by NumbersUSA, a right-wing, anti-immigrant group.

The bill was introduced in the Senate by Sen. David Vitter, R.-La., who is running for Louisiana governor. He needed to garner the 60 votes to override the promised veto, but was able to get only 54, with Senator Mark Steven Kirk, R.-Ill., joining Democrats in opposing the bill.

Had it passed, the state of California would have been particularly hard hit.

California Sen. Barbara Boxer said after the vote that local police officials had warned her that undocumented individuals would be afraid to report crimes if there were a chance they would be deported.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka issued a statement saying that [the anti-sanctuary city bill] “was another attempt to scapegoat hardworking immigrants, enrich for-profit detention facilities, and promote hate instead of unity.

“Punitive legislation like this,” Trumka said, “undermines the rights of all working people and enable abuse by unscrupulous employers.”

Rigoberta Menchu con posibilidad de la paz en Colombia

Prensa Latina

La Premio Nobel de Paz de 1992, la guatemalteca Rigoberta Menchú, expresó hoy que se siente optimista con la posibilidad de que se concrete la paz en Colombia mediante el diálogo.

La líder indígena del país centroamericano, quien se encuentra en Bogotá para asistir a un evento académico sobre educación y paz, dijo al espacio televisivo matutino de la revista Semana que realmente ve posibilidades de llegar a acuerdos, siempre que se recoja la realidad social que vive esta nación andina.

Refiriéndose al proceso de paz que se lleva adelante en La Habana entre el Gobierno y las FARC-EP comentó que se trata de un conflicto que comenzó hace mucho tiempo con violencia y hay que ir estableciendo criterios de entendimiento, para que su fin no sea el de concluir con la propia violencia.

Opinó que la búsqueda de la paz necesita aquí de una agenda, de una amplia línea de acción organizada en la que participen las instituciones, la sociedad y el empresariado, que no tenga límites en cuanto a consenso, que no sea sólo un tema de dos partes sentadas en una mesa.

Menchú calificó de emblemático el acuerdo para la búsqueda de desaparecidos por la guerra anunciado el fin de semana por el Gobierno y las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo.

Explicó que a un desaparecido no se le puede dar por muerto, en tanto no se tiene una evidencia de si falleció o no. Esta es una de las partes más dolorosas que va a ser perdurable en la memoria los colombianos para siempre, apuntó.

Aunque nada puede ser un alivio para las víctimas, conocer la verdad sobre lo sucedido con los desaparecidos es un paso fundamental en el proceso de paz, manifestó la representante del pueblo Maya Quiché.

En relación con las heridas que deja la conflagración, comentó las experiencias del proceso de paz de su país en los años 90 (siglo pasado). Sino se hubiera separado el tema de los derechos humanos, de los crímenes de guerra y de los delitos militares, no se hubieran logrado dignificar a las víctimas y la exhumación de los difuntos, acotó.

Dijo que en este tipo de proceso es más importante buscar la reconciliación que el perdón, para que no se repitan los hechos, que exista respeto entre las partes y no continúe la violencia en la etapa postbélica.

Sobre la conquista de la paz de Guatemala, Menchú señaló que cuando termina el conflicto, los acuerdos de por si no resuelven los problemas, sino las políticas públicas, la buena voluntad de los políticos y se evite que fuerzas externas vengán a romper la tranquilidad ciudadana.

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