

# PEOPLE'S WORLD

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## Labor history: The American Federation of Labor is founded

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**T**he American Federation of Labor, a national federation of labor unions in the United States, was founded at a convention in Columbus, Ohio, on December 8 in 1886. The original constituent craft unions of the AFL were disaffected from the Knights of Labor (K of L), a national labor association.

Samuel Gompers of the Cigar Makers' International Union (CMIU), was elected president of the AFL at its founding convention and was re-elected every year except one until his death in 1924. The AFL remained the largest union grouping in the U.S., even after the 1935 creation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) by unions that left the AFL over its opposition to industrial unionism. In 1955, the AFL merged with the CIO to form the AFL-CIO, a federation which remains in place to this day as the longest lasting and most influential labor federation in the United States.

In January 1886, the Cigar Manufacturers' Association of New York City attempted to flex its muscle by announcing a 20 percent wage cut in factories around the city. The CMIU refused to accept the cut and 6000 of its members in 19 factories were locked out by the owners. A strike lasting four weeks ensued. Just when it appeared that the strike might be won, the K of L offered to settle

with the 19 factories at a lower wage scale than that proposed by the CMIU, so long as only the Progressive Cigarmakers' Union was employed.

The leadership of the CMIU was enraged, and started planning an alliance of craft unions outside the K of L as a means of defending themselves against this and similar incursions. The CMIU, the Granite Cutters, the Iron Molders, and the Carpenters invited all national trade unions to a conference in Philadelphia on May 18, stating that an

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element of the K of L was doing "malicious work" and causing "incalculable mischief by arousing antagonisms and dissensions in the labor movement."

The Philadelphia conference drew the attendance of 20 delegates and letters of approval from

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12 other unions. The K of L was charged with conspiring with anti-union bosses to provide labor at below going union rates and with making use of individuals who had crossed picket lines or defaulted on payment of union dues.

Convinced that no accommodation with the K of L was possible, the labor organizations that issued the call for the Philadelphia conference issued a new call for a convention to be held December 8, 1886 in Columbus, Ohio, in order to construct "an American federation of alliance of all national and international trade unions." Forty-two delegates representing 13 national unions and various other local labor organizations responded to the call, agreeing to form an American Federation of Labor.

The AFL showed slow but incremental growth in its first years, only cracking the 250,000-member mark in 1892. From the outset it concentrated on wages and working conditions of its membership as its almost sole focus. Participation in partisan politics was discouraged as inherently divisive, and the AFL constitution prevented the admission of political parties as affiliates.

The AFL approach relegated larger societal goals to its allies in the political sphere. The Federation favored pursuit of workers' immediate demands rather than challenging property rights of owners, and took a pragmatic view of politics that favored tactical support for particular politicians over formation of a labor party.

The AFL leadership believed the expansion of the capitalist system was seen as the path to betterment of labor, an orientation making it possible for the AFL to present itself as what one historian has called "the conservative alternative to working class radicalism."

By 1935, as the Great Depression once again revealed some of the inherent weaknesses and contradictions in the capitalist system, the AFL craft union model came under challenge from the upstart CIO.



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## Morena taking steps towards gender equality

By Rossana Cambron

**I**n the months of September and October and leading up to Morena's second congress, five major cities in Mexico held workshops which are part of an education plan to help women develop politically. The goal was to set up a safe space for women to learn and practice leadership skills so they can participate in the political transformation of Mexico.

Over 500 women attended the workshops that were held in five locations - each corresponding to one of the five districts of the country. Workshops focused on three major themes: women's equality, ending discrimination, and building leadership skills among women.

In the section on women's equality, the focus was on revisiting the institutional alignments orientated towards equality in both the public and private sectors. Emphasis was placed on promoting personal mechanisms that empower women, actions that facilitate the equal participation of men and women in the decision making process and promoting the participation and equal repre-

sentation of men and women within party structures.

The main aim at the workshop on ending discrimination was to create an understanding that discrimination must be fought on all fronts whether it is based on ethnic or national origin, gender, age, physical limitations, social or economic conditions, health status, pregnancy, language, religion, sexual preferences, marital status, or anything else.

The women's political leadership workshops aimed to develop women as leaders and emphasized that leadership is a capacity that can be developed and nourished it is not an innate attribute but rather can be developed by education, opportunity, specific economic and social conditions, as well as interaction with others.

As Morena committees throughout Mexico and outside of Mexico met to select their delegates to their congress, there was a conscious effort to send an equal number of men and women in an effort to insure equal participation.

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# Women's health advocates say attacks on them are terrorism too

By Emily Likins



Amidst all the fear about “radical Islamic terrorism” being stoked by GOP presidential candidates, women’s groups are pointing out that terrorism is not something limited to an extreme fringe of organizations misusing the Islamic faith to justify their ends. They are reminding Americans that right-wing Christian groups and individuals have been practicing terrorism against providers and consumers of women’s health services for many years now, often injuring and even killing both patients and medical personnel.

To that end a variety of national organizations including NARAL Pro-Choice America, CREDO Action, and the Courage Campaign are demanding a federal Department of Justice inquiry of the shooting outside a Planned Parenthood clinic here. The shooting left three dead and nine injured.

The FBI defines terrorism as violence meant “to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; [or] to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion.”

A police officer, a single mother, and an Iraq war vet were gunned down outside the Planned Parenthood clinic by Robert Lewis Dear, 57, who was apprehended after a five-hour standoff with police and

is being held without bond. He is described as having expressed anti-government and anti-President Obama sentiments; and US Attorney General Loretta Lynch said it was clear that he was “motivated by opposition to safe and legal abortion.”

Abortion advocates have declared Dear’s actions undeniable acts of domestic terrorism, and a coalition of organizations, led by NARAL Pro-Choice America, is pressuring the DOJ to investigate violence against women’s health care clinics as such.

According to CREDO campaign manager Heidi Hess, “incendiary rhetoric” on the lips of legislators, presidential candidates, and right-wing media personalities “vilify Planned Parenthood and the women who access services there,” and asserts what happened in that parking lot was instigated by “a network of actors [in an] intentional campaign to demonize healthcare providers.”

Hess says if the DOJ can take the time to investigate outrageously false claims made against Planned Parenthood because of a badly-doctored fake video, they should have the time and resources to investigate this “very real crime.” Hess says calling anti-abortion violence anything other than terrorism is “a slap in the face to women.”

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## Cuba and U.S. seal deal on defense of the environment

By Ismael Parra

**T**he Center for International Policy, a Washington D.C. think tank, has welcomed the agreement between the United States and Cuba on to increase the two countries' cooperation on shared environmental issues.

The agreement streamlines procedures to make it easier for U.S. and Cuban scientists to work toward the biological resources of both countries. For U.S. scientists, travel to Cuba to work on environmental projects will be eased, as will existing restrictions on funding such projects and shipping research equipment from the United States to Cuba.

In a press release, the Center for International Policy said: "This accord is the result of years of advocacy efforts by the Center for International Policy, the New York Botanical Garden and other research and conservation institutions and non-governmental organizations, as well as attorney/advocate Robert Muse."

Robert Muse said "the agreement is a heartening instance of the U.S. government listening to NGOs, who spoke from a real desire to succeed in the important work they are doing in Cuba.

The advocacy groups began in December 2008 with a letter to then president-elect Obama to ask that he make scientific exchanges with Cuba easier in order to confront shared, growing environmental threats. Changes in visa and licensing policies followed. However, the process for carrying out environmental projects in cooperation with Cuban institutions remained daunting.

## El Sierra Club sobre el Acuerdo Climático de París

Javier Sierra

**H**oy, en Le Bourget, París, se publicó el texto final de las negociaciones del COP21. Se espera que todos los negociadores lo aprueben hoy. Como respuesta, el director ejecutivo del Sierra Club, Michael Brune, emitió la siguiente declaración:

"El acuerdo de París es un hito histórico para la humanidad. Por primera vez, la comunidad global ha acordado actuar y encaminarse hacia la prevención de las peores consecuencias de la crisis climática. Al mismo tiempo, esto nos permite aprovechar la oportunidad de hacer crecer exponencialmente la economía de energía limpia.

"Gracias al decisivo liderazgo y logros del Presidente Obama y otros líderes mundiales, a un movimiento climático cada vez más poderoso y al sólido progreso en Estados Unidos, se abrió camino para que todas las naciones acudieran a la mesa negociadora. La comunidad global ya ha acordado hacer su parte para proteger a millones de personas que ya confrontan las sequías, tormentas e inundaciones extremas propias de la crisis climática y para mejor salvaguardar el planeta que van a heredar nuestros hijos y nuestros nietos.

"París marca el principio y no el final de la tarea que tiene que completarse. En un dramático paso adelante, los países han acordado esforzarse por limitar el calentamiento a menos de 1,5 grados centígrados, y ahora se ven obligados a desarrollar ambiciosos planes para no exceder estos límites.

Además, ahora existen fuertes mecanismos de transparencia y rendición de cuentas, junto con una sólida financiación climática para los países emergentes que incorpora un ímpetu innegable hacia una sociedad amparada por la energía limpia.

"Cualquier persona en Washington, o en las juntas directivas de la compañías de combustibles fósiles de todo el mundo que intente obstaculizar este progreso, se encontrará con la abrumadora resistencia de la comunidad internacional, los mercados globales, el consenso científico, el movimiento climático y la opinión pública. Este histórico acuerdo internacional es lo que exige el pueblo norteamericano, lo que merecen futuras generaciones y lo que el mundo necesita".

El Presidente Obama rechazó el oleoducto Keystone XL, cimentando así aún más su legado climático.

Como respuesta, el director ejecutivo del Sierra Club, Michael Brune, emitió la siguiente declaración: "El Presidente Obama dijo sí a la energía limpia y a la salud pública, y no a los combustibles fósiles y a la peligrosa contaminación. El Sierra Club agradece que el Presidente Obama haya elegido la promesa de prosperidad de la energía limpia y la innovación tecnológica en lugar de los combustibles fósiles del siglo 19. Rechazar el Keystone XL es una victoria para el planeta, para la salud de las comunidades que hubieran estado a lo largo de la ruta del oleoducto y para las futuras generaciones".

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