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Protests demand overturn of “Citizens United” decision

By Marilyn Bechtel



Corporations are not people, their signs read. “Human rights for human beings!”

As several dozen demonstrators greeted commuters leaving a rapid transit station in the early evening of Jan. 21, they were joining people throughout the country who commemorated the first anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission* by calling in various ways to overturn the decision, which gave corporations the rights of citizens to campaign in elections.

Last year, in a narrow 5-4 decision, the court ruled in favor of *Citizens United*, a right-wing nonprofit organization that claimed its free speech rights were harmed by laws that restrict political spending by corporations, unions and other organizations. The ruling opened the way for unlimited election spending by big business.

Within days, President Obama blasted the ruling in his 2010 State of the Union speech, saying the court had “reversed a century of law to open the floodgates for special interests - including foreign corporations - to spend without limit in our elections.” The president called on Congress to “pass a bill to correct some of these problems.”

In April Congressional Democrats introduced the DISCLOSE Act (Democracy is Strengthened by

Casting Light on Spending in Elections), to limit political ad spending by corporations bailed out by the Troubled Asset Relief Program, and those with government contracts or more than 20 percent foreign-owned.

The bill passed the House, but ran aground in the Senate when supporters couldn’t muster 60 votes to bring it to the floor.

Others, including Common Cause, urged public financing of congressional campaigns, and

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some, including the Service Employees International Union, called for shareholder votes before corporations could broadcast ads, as well as protections for workers whose bosses press them to get involved in political activities. And of course, Republicans and corporate interests praised the

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court decision as a victory for First Amendment rights.

The effect on the 2010 midterm elections was clear. Reporting less than two weeks before Election Day, CBS investigative correspondent Sharyl Attkisson said spending of \$3.7 billion was more than 30 percent above the previous midterm, and for the first time outside groups were outspending the Democratic and Republican parties. She said ad volume and spending was up 75 percent over 2008, and quoted Republican strategist Karl Rove as saying, “We’re going to put it to good use to defeat Democrats who have supported the president’s agenda.”

Fast forward to this year’s anniversary: From Alabama to Alaska and many points in between, activists came together under the banners of MoveOn, Public Citizen and others to urge support for a constitutional amendment stating that corporations are not natural persons and are not entitled to constitutional rights.

MoveOn also urged signatures on petitions to state lawmakers asking them to support a reso-

lution calling for a constitutional amendment. Senator Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., reintroduced the Disclose Act.

Common Cause is calling on the Justice Department to investigate a possible conflict of interest on the part of Supreme Court justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, who voted with the majority. They were featured guests at secret strategy sessions sponsored by Koch Industries, which benefited greatly from Citizens United.

Business leaders held a press conference to announce formation of Business for Democracy, to oppose unlimited spending on candidates for public office. Among participants: Ben & Jerry’s founders Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, Stonyfield Farm, Seventh Generation and nearly two dozen other companies and leaders.

And proponents of public funding for elections pointed to the Fair Elections Now Act, introduced by Reps. John Larson, D-Conn., Chellie Pingree, D-Maine, and Walter Jones, R-N.C.



Marilyn Bechtel writes for the People’s World.

The roots of Tuscon

By PW Editorial Board

While Rush Limbaugh and his cohorts continue to vigorously deny it, the Tucson shootings were a political crime. The target was a Democratic congressperson, not a Republican or a random authority figure. She is also Jewish, female and a previous victim of political violence.

The violence in Tucson is also not an isolated incident. According to the last figures issued by the FBI, there were 8,336 victims of hate crimes committed by 6,225 people in 2009. The victims in these statistics were overwhelmingly African-Americans, Hispanics and other minorities, immigrants, Jews, Muslims or people thought to be Muslims, gays and lesbians and people with disabilities. Not included were many others such as abortion providers, Democratic office holders and government agencies. Some victims have also been safety officers, including the security guard at the Holocaust museum, the police officers in Pittsburgh who faced an anti-Obama fanatic and the California highway patrolmen injured in a shootout with a man egged on by Glenn Beck’s ravings against the Tides Foundation.

The perpetrators of nearly all these crimes, are not Muslim terrorists or leftists. They are overwhelmingly white males motivated by racism and right-wing extremism. Since the 1930s the Republican Party has been the main party of the rich and big business. Since the 1960s and, especially since President Nixon’s Southern Strategy, it has been the party of racism. Now, in the more recent period and especially since the election of President Obama, it has also become the party of right-wing extremism, including extremist violence.

The Tucson attack has taken some wind out of the GOP sails. But there are signs the tide has turned. Tucson has opened a lot of eyes. Obama’s handling of the attack has won high marks, while the ultra-right’s mascot candidate, Sarah Palin, has suffered a huge setback. Yes, there must be greater unity and civility. Yes, there must be more support for mental health programs. Yes, there must be far stricter gun control. But there must also be recognition that it is right-wing extremism that opposes all these things, that it constitutes the main danger to the safety and security of the people.

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Honeywell lockout threatens thousands

By Scott Marshal

The Steelworkers issued a well researched report this week outlining the health and safety hazards posed by the use of scab replacement workers to operate Honeywell's Metropolis Illinois plant. The report, entitled, "Communities at Risk," documents substantial threats to tens of thousands of residents in Illinois and Kentucky.

The Honeywell plant processes uranium to make nuclear fuel. The process requires the use of some of the most toxic materials known to humankind. It requires a highly skilled and safety conscious workforce. Steelworker members of local 7-669 have been locked out by Honeywell since June 28, 2010.

During the six-month lockout there have been two major scares at the plant. On September 5, 2010 the accidental recombination of hydrogen and fluorine produced an explosion that shook the plant and scared nearby residents. Fortunately no one was hurt.

Then on December 22, 2010 a release of hydrofluoric acid triggered emergency sirens and activated the facilities emergency mitigation towers.

According to their figures the release of just 16 percent of this amount of hydrofluoric acid could impact as many as 128,000 people in the surrounding 25 mile radius.

At a press conference to release the report, Illinois State Rep. Brandon Phelps joined with USW 7-669 President Darrell Lillie in calling on federal regulatory agencies to order a safe shutdown of the plant until a new labor agreement is negotiated and the skilled union workers can return to their jobs. "In light of the community safety report, it is irresponsible for Honeywell to keep operating," said Rep. Phelps. "The warning signs were made clear in the report. It's not a question



of if, but when a disaster will occur."

The Steelworkers were locked out six months ago, when negotiations on a new contract reached a deadlock. The local union proposed to keep working without a contract until negotiations could be settled, but Honeywell locked them out and brought in scabs instead. The union represents about 230 workers in the plant.

Negotiations deadlocked on the issues of healthcare and pensions, another indication of Honeywell's callous approach to health issues. This in the face of the fact, that some 42 workers from the plant have died of cancer and another 27 are struggling with the disease.

At the press conference local union president Willie said, "inside the plant, our union members are guardians of safety. At the present time, the inexperienced temps are in the Honeywell metropolis plant and under the thumb of management without the needed training and without a commitment to community safety." While pledging to continue efforts to bargain in good faith, Willie vowed, "We will not bargain away worker safety, or safety of the community."

The process requires the use of some of the most toxic materials known to humankind.

Justice finally served for nurse whistleblowers

By Vivian Weinstein

It looks like justice is finally being served against the real criminals in the Winkler County Nurses Case..

Dr. Arafiles, the physician whom the nurses reported, was arrested in December 2010, and indicted on the same charges previously used against the nurses. Stan Wiley, the hospital administrator who fired them, resigned and has also been indicted. Sheriff Roberts and Attorney Scott Tidwell, who filed the charges against the nurses, have now been indicted on felony charges of misuse of official information. A county prosecutor has not been charged, though it has been suggested that he had to have known the original charges against the nurses were false.

Nurses Anne Mitchell and Vicki Galle were fired and arrested in 2009 after they reported questionable practices by Dr. Arafiles at Winkler Memorial Hospital. Sheriff Roberts was a friend and business associate of the doctor. The nurses reported Arafiles after making many complaints about improper medical procedures within the hospital. They documented his selling questionable supplements to patients in a business the doctor ran with the county sheriff.

The state of Texas substantiated the nurses' charges against Dr. Arafiles. Winkler County Hospital has been fined \$15,850 for improper supervision of the physician.

The Texas National Nurses organization and other national nurses organizations have been supportive.

Now this case upholds the right as well as duty of a nurse to advocate for patient care.

Tragedia en Brasil

Por Prensa Latina

Brasilia (PL) El gobierno brasileño agradeció el ofrecimiento de ayuda y las manifestaciones de solidaridad por parte de innumerables países, instituciones y organizaciones internacionales ante la tragedia provocada por las lluvias. Un nota divulgada por el Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores precisa que Brasil continuará cooperando con esos países, instituciones y organismos internacionales para mitigar los efectos de las fuertes lluvias y las inundaciones que recientemente afectaron varios municipios del este inmenso país suramericano.

“El gobierno brasileño reitera el compromiso con la cooperación internacional en las acciones sustentables de reducción de riesgos de calamidades y con el fortalecimiento de la capacidad de prevención y de recuperación de desastres”, indica la información oficial.

Destaca que el gobierno brasileño hará esfuerzos para que el Sistema Nacional de Alerta y Prevención de Desastres Naturales, bajo la coordinación del Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología, comience a reducir los efectos de los eventos naturales ya el próximo verano. La temporada lluviosa de este año ha provocado inundaciones y deslizamientos de tierra en varios estados, pero la peor tragedia la viven los habitantes de la región serrana de Río de Janeiro, donde intensas precipitaciones a inicios de la semana anterior dejan hasta ahora

711 muertos, mientras continúa la búsqueda de cadáveres.

El último balance preliminar de las autoridades locales y la Defensa Civil confirma 335 muertos en el municipio de Nova Friburgo, 285 en Teresópolis, 62 en Petrópolis, 22 en Sumidouro, seis en Sao José do Vale do Río Petro y uno en Bom Jardim, que se incorporó hoy a la lista de territorios con víctimas fatales.

La prefectura de Sao José do Vale do Río Petro indicó que no ha podido verificar que los seis cadáveres hallados en su municipio sean de moradores locales y agregó que podrían ser de habitantes de localidades cercanas que llegaron a la ciudad por la corriente del Río Preto.

Las autoridades locales y los organismos de socorro evitan dar cifras de desaparecidos, que estimados extraoficiales calculan en más de 200, mientras son más de 14 mil los desalojados y desabrigados. El prefecto de Teresópolis, Jorge Mario Sedlacek, reveló que este lunes firmó la expropiación de una hacienda de 190 hectáreas en el barrio Ermitage para la construcción de 500 casas populares a fin de atender las necesidades de parte de los desabrigados del municipio. La alta cifra de muertos por los deslizamientos de tierra de la semana anterior, que aumenta cada hora, es considerada ya la peor catástrofe natural de la historia de Brasil, que supera por mucho los 436 fallecidos en 1967 en la ciudad de Caraguatatuba, en el litoral norte de Sao Paulo.

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