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Mass. election lesson: 'Don't mourn, organize'

By Joelle Fishman

Don't Mourn, Organize!" This is the growing call from labor and progressive forces following the upset election in Massachusetts of Republican Scott Brown to the U.S. Senate.

Even before the polls closed, the right-wing and the media began their spin that the president and Congress should forget their agenda and give in to Republican obstructionism

Such an approach would be a much larger disaster than the loss of one seat.

Voters were angry and looking for relief from the economic crisis: they did not see the jobs that were created from the stimulus; they feared that their health benefits would be taxed or taken away; and they didn't hear Democrat Martha Coakley address their concerns. Meanwhile Scott Brown used populist rhetoric and clips of JFK to claim the Kennedy legacy.

"You see," said AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka, "they believe that Wall St. is being taken care of. They believe that corporate America is being taken care of. They believe the insurers are being taken care of. But they don't think that workers are being taken care of."

The Democratic Party in Massachusetts was divided after the primary elections, adding to the



inability to get out the vote. When national Republican strategists saw the opening of a weak Democratic campaign, their play book went into effect. Millions of dollars were raised on-line from around the country, utilizing the "Tea Party" network built up over the summer. TV airtime was filled with ads, and automated phone calls went

T H I S W E E K :

- **Mass. election lesson: 'Don't mourn, organize'**
- **Editorial: Setting the record straight**
- **Is this a socialist moment?**
- **Los trabajadores de Rite-Aid luchan**
- **Thousands commemorate a legend**

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into voters' homes.

The anger and frustration about jobs and the economy is national. To regain momentum, big, bold, decisive actions are required that will create millions of jobs and rebuild the economy. It will take standing up to the opposition, not giving in.

A state labor leader told The Hill magazine,

The anger and frustration about jobs and the economy is national.

“If officials go running to the center like some are calling for, and away from what they campaigned on, they learned exactly the wrong lesson from this election.”

An exit poll on health care showed that “by a margin of three-to-two,” former Obama voters who voted for Republican Scott Brown said the Senate health care bill “doesn’t go far enough.” Six-to-one Obama voters who stayed home agreed. And to top it off, 80% of all voters still want the choice of a public option in the bill.”

An AFL-CIO poll showed that the recent Democratic compromise to tax working family’s health care benefits is a losing strategy. Voters who thought their health care would be taxed voted 64% for Brown in protest.

Health Care for America Now is mobilizing to “Finish Health Reform Right,” demanding that “health care must be affordable for everyone, not tax benefits and hold insurance companies accountable with the choice of a public health insurance option.”

The election in Massachusetts should not be read as a shift to the right, but rather as an in-

dication of inconsistent thinking and flux on the part of voters in a time of hardship and the biggest wealth gap in history. It was a protest telling Democrats they must take on the opposition and deliver for people’s needs.

Republican strategist Dick Morris was gleeful after Massachusetts, imagining how to create a Republican majority in this year’s elections. This trumpeting is part of the plan to create a favorable political climate for reaction, including widespread use of racism and anti-immigrant bashing.

But these dire projections will not become reality if labor along with the African American, Latino, Asian Pacific American, women and youth voters, in the first place, mobilize like never before at the grassroots and push Congress and the president to take on Wall Street and deliver for jobs and economic security including government programs financed by cutting spending on the wars, and taxing extreme wealth.



Joelle Fishman is chair of the Political Action Commission of the Communist Party.

In expressing our differences with the president, Communists go to great lengths to state them in a constructive way.

Setting the record straight

By PW Editorial Board

It is said by some that Communists have no differences with President Obama. Just to set the record straight: Communists have differences and have stated them. We opposed the nearly unconditional Wall Street bailouts. We oppose the deployment of more troops to Afghanistan. We argue for a bigger stimulus package. We oppose the tax on health plans, and support universal, free health care as a right.

And, we said, the president should push the envelope more, take much bolder action on job creation, otherwise he runs the danger of the extreme right turning the popular discontent over the economic crisis against him.

But in expressing our differences with the president, Communists go to great lengths to state them in a constructive way.

The main organizations of the working class and people don’t turn their differences with the president into an unbridgeable divide between them and him. They consider him a friend and are mindful of the unrelenting attack, steeped in

racism and other forms of division, coming from right-wing extremists, against our nation’s first African American president.

The left has something to learn from this approach. We are too comfortable in our role as an exceedingly small, but “principled and militant” grouping in U.S. politics. Such a posture may feel satisfying, but it won’t help us evolve into a political player that exercises a major influence on U.S. politics, nor get us a flea hop closer to socialism.

The president has made mistakes, particularly his handling of the financial, jobs and health care crises, but he isn’t the main obstacle to social change.

The role of the left is to help navigate these differences, while at the same time infusing energy and clarity and sustaining the strategic unity of the people’s movement against the main enemy - right-wing extremism and powerful sections of big capital. In doing so, the left will move into the center of U.S politics.



Is this a socialist moment?

By Sam Webb

Is this a socialist moment? I hear this question when I travel. So here is the answer I usually give when asked at public meetings. It depends on how we understand a “socialist moment.” If it means that the American people in their majority are insisting on a socialism transformation of society, there is little evidence for it. People are angry and frustrated; they want change; they are ready to struggle for jobs and relief, health care, public education, housing assistance and so on. But are they demanding a system change, a socialist society? Not yet. To say otherwise seems like a stretch to me.

If, however, what is meant is that many more people are ready to give socialism a hearing, not reject it out of hand, then I would say, “Yes, this is a ‘socialist moment’.” This is no small thing. It wasn’t that long ago that socialism didn’t have much currency among broad sections of the American people. It was considered a failed model, undemocratic and worse, a bankrupt idea - something best consigned to history.

In fact, the ideologues of capitalism thought they had buried the socialist idea once and for all, but to their chagrin the genie is once again out of the bottle, thanks in large measure to the conditions buffeting the domestic and world economy. It is not economic determinism to say that force of economic circumstance and the crisis of everyday living for tens of millions is shaping and reshaping mass thinking, although in contradictory ways.

Communists and socialists should welcome the rebirth of this dialogue on socialism and ea-



gerly participate in it.

Like everything else our vision of socialism needs to adjust to new conditions (economic crisis) and challenges (economic and environmental sustainability, nuclear disarmament, world poverty and inequality) as well as examine the experience of socialism in the 20th century.

After all, there are no universal models into which every country fits. The cloth of socialist experience is a beautiful weave of many colors and threads, not a drab monotonous gray. Each country fashions a socialism that bears a deep imprint of its own history, politics, economics and culture.

The experience of successful and unsuccessful socialist revolutions and societies has to be filtered carefully into our national context. In no case can those experiences be uncritically and simplistically imported.

As Gus Hall, the former leader of the Communist Party USA, said on many occasions, “We are for Bill of Rights Socialism,” referring to our nation’s Bill of Rights, which in his view would be preserved and expanded upon in a socialist society in the United States.

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Thousands commemorate a legend

By Brandon Berrios

Thousands from all corners of North Texas gathered at the downtown Convention Center here on Jan. 18 to remember a man who lifted a nation into the fight for equality.

Floats made their way down the street. People on all sides were waving and carrying posters or signs with pictures and quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. One that really caught my eye said, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of humanity."

Such unity was seen during this parade, for thousands of people worked together to display a magnificent tribute to Dr. King.

The rising unemployment numbers had a great impact on the parade, for there were labor union workers holding "Jobs now" signs. Jobs with Justice activists gathered signatures and handed out leaflets about the job crisis. Unsurprisingly, many people were willing to show their support as we are all feeling the pressure of this recession.

Surprisingly, I don't recall seeing any mainstream press, or any press at all for that matter. I was expecting to see the white vans the camera crews always drive. The parade was not just to commemorate a man who revolutionized the nation, but living proof that what Dr. King and so many others fought and died for was not in vain.

Los trabajadores de Rite-Aid luchan por su primer contrato

Por Juan Lopez

Cuando se trata de romper sindicatos, la farmacia gigante Rite Aid es el ejemplo perfecto para explicar porque necesitamos pasar el acta de libre elección para empleados (EFCA por sus siglas en ingles), dice Peter Olney, el director de organizadores para el sindicato internacional de los estibadores (ILWU por sus siglas en ingles). Cerca de 600 trabajadores que trabajan en el almacén sureste de Lancaster, Calif., creían que habían vencido en su lucha cuando ganaron un voto a favor del sindicato. Al poco rato descubrieron que la pelea por su primer contrato prolongará la lucha.

El acta EFCA permitirá a los trabajadores formar un sindicato por medio de firmar tarjetas autorizando representación sindical, exigirá arbitraje para prevenir que los empleadores estancan negociaciones de contrato, y aumentaran sanciones por violaciones de los derechos de los trabajadores que están a favor de sindicalización.

Después de tres años de una viciosa campaña anti-trabajador por la compañía farmacéutica tercer más grande del país, "los trabajadores siguen apoyando al sindicato", dice Olney, "pero han sufrido mucho".

Aumento de velocidad de trabajo, horas extras mandatorios, maltrato y despedidas sin razón son algunos de las quejas que motivaron a los trabajadores hacer contacto con el ILWU en el 2006.

En una elección supervisada por La Mesa Nacional de Relaciones Labo-

rales, los trabajadores votaron para afiliarse al ILWU en Marzo del 2008.

Pero luego de dieciséis meses y 60 sesiones de negociaciones los trabajadores siguen sin un contrato.

A pesar de una campana por parte de la compañía que incluye acoso, intimidación, amenaza ilegal, despedidas de los que apoyan al sindicato, el uso de asesores especializados en luchas en contra de sindicalización, y un esfuerzo para revocar la certificación del ILWU, los trabajadores siguen firme en su apoyo del sindicato.

En las negociaciones con la compañía, los trabajadores ganaron protecciones del calor interior peligroso, el derecho de negarse a hacer trabajos peligrosos y un proceso para tratar problemas ergonómicos.

Cuando el sindicato vuelve a negociaciones, espera finalizar un acuerdo con la compañía sobre una nueva política tratando la disciplina y despedida de los empleados.

Olney se queja de que compañías como Rite Aid emplean medidas intimidatorias y despiden a trabajadores que tratan de organizar. "Cuando los encuentran culpables, las consecuencias son mínimas".

Para los trabajadores, dice Olney "ha sido una lucha tremenda pero se quedan con el sindicato." Tiene confianza "van a triunfar, y el ILWU también, concluyo".

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