

PEOPLE'S WORLD

www.peoplesworld.org

March 5, 2010

Rhode Island is ground zero for war on teachers

By Susan Webb

Some 1,000 teachers and supporters from Rhode Island's labor movement packed a town park here in Central Falls, R.I. Feb. 23 in a rousing show of support for nearly 100 teachers and school personnel threatened with firing by the school superintendent, Frances Gallo.

But that did not deter the school board from voting, 5-2, to OK the firing of every teacher at the only high school in this impoverished, majority minority, former mill town. As the names of 74 classroom teachers, plus reading specialists, guidance counselors, physical education teachers, the school psychologist, the principal and three assistant principals, were read aloud, the teachers, many wearing red - one of the school's colors - stood up, some crying.

In the audience also were students like 17-year-old Kelyn Salazar, a Central Falls High junior, who told a reporter, "It's not motivating me to come to school anymore." At the rally earlier, she told the crowd the teacher firings would hurt students academically and emotionally. It "makes my heart break into pieces," she said.

The firings were hailed by right-wing anti-union groups such as the Muskegon, Mich.-based "Education Action Group Foundation," which said



it is putting up a billboard in Central Falls backing the superintendent's action. This group boasts that it publishes two anti-union blogs, NEAexposed.com and AFTexposed.com. It has ties to the Michigan Republican Party and billionaire Dick DeVos.

The mass teacher firings also drew immediate praise from U.S. Education Secretary Arne

T H I S W E E K :

- **Rhode Island is ground zero for war on teachers**
- **Editorial: Greek workers fight back**
- **'Remember health care victims when you see the shoes'**
- **Terremoto en Chile**
- **Ohio kicks off jobs fight**

READ MORE NEWS AND OPINION DAILY AT WWW.PEOPLESWORLD.ORG

Duncan. In comments his aide e-mailed to the Providence Journal that night, Duncan said he "applauded" the school board for "showing courage and doing the right thing for kids." President Obama also backed the move.

The administration's support for the mass firings will be seen by many as a slap in the face to

Each school district applying for the funding is required to implement one of four “rigorous interventions.”

teachers, their unions and the entire labor movement. The impact could extend far beyond those directly involved in education, as labor is widely recognized as the crucial factor to Obama’s 2008 victory in some key states.

Gallo said she made the move because teachers refused to accept her “transformational” plan to remedy the school’s low test scores and graduation rates. But Central Falls Teachers Union President Jane Sessums told a reporter, “We don’t take lightly that our scores are low. Everyone acknowledges that we have work to do.”

Last August, Duncan announced requirements for \$3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement grants to “turn around the nation’s lowest performing schools.”

Each school district applying for the funding is required to implement one of four “rigorous interventions.”

First on the list is a “turnaround model” that calls for replacing the principal and at least 50 percent of the school’s staff, and adopting a “new governance structure” and “new or revised instructional program.”

Number two is the “restart model” - close “failing” schools and reopen them under the management of a charter school operator or “manage-

ment organization.”

Number three is simply labeled “school closure” - close “failing” schools and transfer the students to other schools in the district.

Last on the list is the “transformational model” - 1) developing “teacher and school leader effectiveness,” which includes replacing the principal, 2) implementing “comprehensive instructional reform strategies,” 3) “extending learning and teacher planning time and creating community-oriented schools,” and 4) “providing operating flexibility and sustained support.”

Any district with nine or more schools affected is not allowed to use any single strategy in more than half of its schools.

Chicago, where Duncan was schools chief before his current job, has been a laboratory for those models, with 85 school closings in the past few years, massive shuffling of students among schools, and wholesale firings of everyone from teachers with Master’s degrees to cafeteria “lunch ladies.” A recent report by a civic group there – a group that was supportive of Duncan’s Chicago policies – found that there was little improvement during Duncan’s tenure.



Susan Webb is co-editor of the Peoples World.

Greek workers fight back

By PW Editorial Board

It’s a story with which workers in the U.S.A. are very familiar. A right wing government allowed finance capital to run wild with unregulated speculative practices. Then comes the time to pay the piper, and the ruling class tries to force the workers, small farmers and ordinary people to bear the burden.

This is now happening in Greece. Past Greek governments failed to regulate the dangerous behavior of finance capital. Now the world financial crisis which started in the United States has hit Greece hard. The country is running a huge deficit and the national debt now exceeds the GDP. Greece’s European Union partners are worrying that the rot will spread.

The EU is trying to force Greece to deal with this problem by austerity measures. The wealthier European countries plus the IMF have joined in to apply the thumbscrews. Though the current Greek government, of the social democratic PASOK party, did not exactly create the present crisis, it is moving to yield to these pressures by laying off

public sector workers, increasing regressive taxes, and raising the retirement age, among other measures that put the burden on the shoulders of Greek workers and farmers..

Trade unionists organized by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) blocked the entrance to the Athens Stock Exchange in protest. There was a 24 hour general strike organized by major unions, which tied up Greece’s important shipping industry. Farmers had already been blocking roads to protest against the austerity policies.

Similar things are happening all over Europe. The brag of the European Union was always that it had successfully integrated poorer countries (Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain) into a trade block with richer ones. Now each of those poorer countries is undergoing similar experiences to those Greece is suffering. Maybe the model was not so good after all?

Here, as in Greece, unity, solidarity and struggle are the answer.



Trade unionists organized by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) blocked the entrance to the Athens Stock Exchange in protest.

‘Remember health care victims when you see the shoes’

By John Bachtell

Sixty-eight Americans die prematurely every day because they can't get access to health care coverage. This crisis prompted 35 residents of Rep. Judy Biggert's, R-Ill., district to take action and sit in at her office in Willowbrook, Ill., Feb. 18, to demand she support health care reform. Willowbrook is a suburb of Chicago.

"In the last 15 years 11,000 Illinoisans have died because we don't have health care reform," said Jonathan VanderBrug, Health Care Justice coordinator for the Campaign for Better Health Care. "Enough playing politics. Stop stalling. Get it done. This is a matter of life and death."

Altogether, over 294,000 Americans died prematurely since 1994, when the health insurance corporations blocked the last major effort for health care reform. Residents are determined to make sure reform legislation passes Congress this year.

The sit-in took place as it was announced the top five health insurers set record profits, a combined \$12.2 billion for 2009, up 56% from the year before. Meanwhile the industry shed 2.7 million people from health care plans.

Biggert has been voting in lockstep with the Republicans, said VanderBrug, obstructing reform. She had refused to meet with CBHC and her constituents since August despite repeated calls, infuriating many.

Constituents left behind a pile of empty shoes



representing people who have died because they didn't have access to health care.

"One shoe is for a friend who passed away. He had cancer and didn't have health insurance. And the other shoe is for my mother. She has a pre-existing condition and I can't get health insurance for her. We should be a country that cares about each other," said one constituent.

"Eight years ago I was diagnosed with AIDS. But my insurance wouldn't cover the costs of my medical treatment causing me to go into bankruptcy," explained another. "I get medical care through the Ryan White Care Act. With the economic crisis I can lose that and there is a strong probability I will be dead in 6 months. Remember me every time you see my shoes."

Mass joblessness is stressing states like Illinois who must spend more money on Medicaid, the only lifeline for those who are jobless without health care coverage. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided \$87 billion in increased funding for Medicaid to fiscally hard strapped states. Biggert voted against the act.

Mass joblessness is stressing states like Illinois who must spend more money on Medicaid.

Ohio kicks off jobs fight

By Bruce Bostick

It's a great day to fight for working families," thundered Ohio AFL-CIO President Joe Rugola to the March for Jobs in Columbus, Ohio, Feb. 24. "It's snowing here and they're sitting up there in Wall St., nice and warm. It's going to get a whole lot hotter there, as we organize and fight for jobs and security for working families here in America!"

The March for Jobs is just the first of many, according to Working America Director Dan Heck. "People are mad, and they should be. We felt like we'd start the ball rolling."

Marie Feters is a township trustee from "farm country." She drove to the capital to say "We need jobs, too!"

Tim Burga, operations director of the Ohio AFL-CIO, was introduced as "our local celebrity," after Rush Limbaugh had recently attacked him as a "union thug."

"Rush certainly appears to be worried about what we're doing here, and he damned well ought to be. It's the corporate thieves that pay his way that we're going after," Burga said.

Two young African American men, dressed in dark suits, passed out Monopoly money along the march.

"We just felt like it's Monopoly money to the big CEOs," said Stan Ossei-Bonsu. "We've lost over a quarter of all manufacturing jobs in our entire nation, but the CEO of Lehman Brothers takes home \$484 million. Man, that's obscene!"

Terremoto en Chile

By Prensa Latina

Cientos son muertos y considerables daños en viviendas e infraestructuras ocasionó el potente terremoto que afectó el centro y sur de Chile, informó la Oficina Nacional de Emergencia (ONEMI).

"La cifra va variando minuto a minuto y ahora llega a 147", precisó Carmen Fernández, directora de ONEMI, al dar a conocer el más reciente reporte oficial de víctimas.

El movimiento telúrico, de 8,8 grados en la escala de Richter, es el más potente registrado durante las últimas décadas en el país y, aunque tuvo su epicentro en Concepción, se sintió en gran parte del territorio.

La presidenta chilena, Michelle Bachelet, declaró el estado de catástrofe en cinco regiones, incluida la capital, con el fin de agilizar la llegada de ayuda a las zonas afectadas.

De acuerdo con las autoridades, la periferia de la ciudad de Concepción es la más afectada por el sismo, aunque también se derrumbaron edificios en Valparaíso, Viña del Mar y en esta capital.

Las regiones de Bío Bío y Maule resultaron las más dañadas por el oleaje intenso del terremoto, aunque no alcanzaron la envergadura de un maremoto.

El aeropuerto de Santiago también sufrió afectaciones, lo cual obligó a las autoridades a decretar el cierre de la terminal aérea por 24 horas, mientras en el sector de Lampa una fábrica

petroquímica se incendió.

"Este es el terremoto más grande registrado aquí en los últimos 30 años y va a significar un esfuerzo nacional para enfrentarlo y superarlo", apuntó el presidente electo, Sebastián Piñera.

Piñera, quien asumirá el cargo el 11 de marzo, anunció su decisión de destinar dos por ciento del presupuesto público para la reconstrucción de las zonas afectadas.

Numerosos gobiernos y organizaciones internacionales como la ONU, la OEA y el Sistema de Integración Centroamericana expresaron su solidaridad con Chile y mostraron su disposición a brindar asistencia al país suramericano.

El presidente de la Asamblea General de la ONU, Alí Treki, convocó hoy a la comunidad internacional a brindar asistencia a Chile, país sacudido esta madrugada por el terremoto.

El diplomático pidió a los Estados miembros de Naciones Unidas a desplegar todos los esfuerzos posibles para ayudar de manera urgente al país suramericano para enfrentar las consecuencias del movimiento telúrico.

Poco antes, el secretario general de la ONU, Ban Ki-Moon, anunció que la organización mundial está lista para suministrar asistencia a Chile.

El terremoto tuvo su epicentro cerca de la localidad de Maule, 321 kilómetros al suroeste de Santiago, la capital, y hasta ahora causó la muerte a más de 145 personas, según datos oficiales preliminares.