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Labor launches second Bill of Rights

By John Wojcik



After two years of defending itself against wave after wave of attacks, the labor movement seems to be mounting a full scale counter-offensive this summer.

On Saturday, Aug. 11, 45,000 workers and allies gathered in Philadelphia in the first major activity of the Workers Stand for America campaign. Unions used the mass gathering to roll out what they are calling America's Second Bill of Rights.

The Second Bill of Rights is an economic one, listing as rights things like full employment, a living wage, full participation in the political process, a voice at work, quality education, and a secure and happy future.

"Economic opportunity is not reaching the vast majority of working men and women in America," said International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers President Edwin Hill. "It is time to refocus the agenda on rebuilding economic opportunity for all."

Tens of thousands in Philadelphia will be asked to sign the Second Bill of Rights.

The Second Bill of Rights will be presented to delegates at both the Republican and Democratic national conventions later this summer.

Labor leaders say there is no contradiction between labor's renewed determination to stake out its own independent position and its support

for President Obama's reelection campaign.

AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Arlene Holt Baker said unions and "all working families really have two jobs this November. The first is to defeat right wing politicians who want to end collective bargaining rights, who want to keep outsourcing every good job in America and who want to divide and conquer working people."

She noted that the AFL-CIO's decision to deploy 400,000 union volunteers for the election

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was proof of the labor movement's seriousness in this regard.

"The second job we have," she said, "is to continue to change the conversations in America so that every single elected official understands that the greatest threat to America isn't public debt but

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economic inequality, that it's political poison to hurt working families and its wrong to support free trade that punishes working people."

Holt Baker said the labor movement will continue putting resources into its own political action committees and programs "instead of just handing those resources over to political parties.

"Only with an independent labor movement can we campaign day-in and day-out for working people," she said. "It will work. We know that working people everywhere are hungry for a national action plan to build prosperity and for the right to be able to bargain collectively for a better life."

Labor leaders from all around the country met in Chicago last week under the banner of Workers' Voice, the new superPAC unions set up in order to compete with the slew of corporate-funded superPACs that came into existence after the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision.

Presidents of state labor federations and officers in a variety of unions participated in the State Legislative Conference called by Workers Voice.

"Since 2010 the attacks on collective bargaining rights and so many of the other attacks

on the labor movement have been launched on the state level," said one participant. "That is why we are going on the offensive here with our own legislation that we want to introduce into state legislative bodies all over the country." Since 2010 right-wing groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council have written and distributed to state legislators boiler-plate bills that limit collective bargaining and voter rights. Now, partly as a result of the meetings in Chicago last week, there are hundreds of progressive bills drafted and waiting to be introduced into state legislative bodies all over the country. Union leaders present said much of this will be done in 2013.

The bills do everything from defending public workers to creating and keeping decent jobs in the states.

"The labor movement isn't going to close up shop after the November election," said a union leader present. "We'll be more in the public eye in 2013 than ever before."



John Wojcik is co-editor of Peoplesworld.org

Oak Creek tragedy rooted in right-wing extremism

By PW Editorial Board

The murder of six people of Sikh faith and the wounding of others at their religious center in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, near Milwaukee, should be strongly condemned by public figures and organizations alike.

This sort of violence will not go away on its own. Passage of new gun laws is part of the answer. Contrary to what is suggested in the mass media, these crimes are neither completely inexplicable nor completely random. Nor are they fully explained by the mental instability of the assailant, in this case Wade Michael Page.

For the past three decades the toxic venom coming from prominent and not-so-prominent ideologues of the right has overwhelmed the ideas of decency, fairness, democracy, and equality. From legislative halls to religious pulpits, from radio talk shows to television broadcasts, from tea party rallies to national conferences, the hateful rhetoric of the right has created an atmosphere that encourages the formation of violent right-wing fringe groups and sets the stage for acts of

violence.

White supremacy, Islamophobia, homophobia, misogyny, and xenophobia are at the core of the message of these ideologues of the right.

The ideological zealots of the right turned both the election of a black president and the economic crisis into fodder to further spread hate.

Wade Michael Page didn't appear out of nowhere. He was in no small part a product of the rhetorically incendiary environment manufactured by right-wing extremist ideologues and their wealthy backers.

Not to take that into account is to miss the forest for the trees. It is politically disarming in the face of this outbreak of seemingly random and senseless violence against Sikh Americans. No solution to the increasing horrific incidents of violence in our national life is separable from the struggle to roll back the influence of the right in our national politics. The immediate task is to defeat the right wing in November.

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LGBT hunger striker: I want the same rights as you

By John Rummel

Sometimes, it's a good thing to go hungry. Throughout the state and up to the general election, Michigan's "anti-equality environment" is being protested with a 100-day hunger strike.

Leaders from Michigan's eight Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community centers and others have signed up for 24-hour shifts in the front window space of Affirmations, the state's largest LGBT community center located in in this suburb on the outskirts of Detroit.

At 2:00 p.m. yesterday, 40-year-old Hamtramck hunger striker Jon Piechota was five hours into his 24-hour shift. Hunger pains had not yet hit. Easily viewed from the large picture window, hunger strikers have access to a comfortable chair, couch and other amenities (just no solid food). Piechota has heard the evening shift can "be a lot of fun" because outside foot traffic picks up when patrons of nearby bars and restaurants go by.

For work, he details cars while his partner, a mechanic, works under the hood. Usually at this time of year he's working 12- to 14-hour days preparing cars for the Dream Cruise, a Metro Detroit classic car event, taking place next Saturday, that draws over one million spectators.

However, the importance of this strike forced him to set 24 hours aside. "I can't get married, can be denied housing, can't adopt children, and domestic partner benefits in the state are being taken away. It's just not right," said Piechota



The state's anti-equality environment has gone from bad to worse under Republican leadership. Extreme bills prohibiting communities from adopting non-discrimination ordinances and, unbelievably, turning anti-bullying legislation into its opposite by allowing bullying if done for religious or moral convictions have all been introduced.

Piechota cautions people to carefully weigh their vote to ensure they don't support someone trying to deny rights or "screw over a close family member."

"I pay taxes too," Piechota said. "I'm tired of not having the same benefits and laws."

He said people sometime ask if he's advocating for "special rights." "I say no, I just want the same rights you have."

Cassandra Varner, Affirmations Director of Communications, said shifts are still available and urges people to become a striker or strike advocate by calling 248-677-7230.

The state's anti-equality environment has gone from bad to worse under Republican leadership.

North Texas takes stand to save the right to retire

By Jim Lane

On the morning of August 14, they met in front of a downtown Verizon store here. The day was the 77th anniversary of Social Security and three days after contract expiration for Communications Workers of America Local 6171. Verizon negotiators, who have hard-lined Communications Workers and Electricians locals in the Eastern United States for over a year, agreed to a short contract extension with Local 6171, which covers Texas. Even though the workers have given the company consistent profits, management wants to take away health care rights and terminate their pension program.

Over the past month in North Texas, two major corporations have already terminated pension programs: Lockheed Aircraft and EFH Energy. American Airlines has been trying for several months to get out of their pension obligations through bankruptcy. Thousands of North Texans have already lost their pension rights.

Several letters to the editor in the Dallas paper have protested the general trend to take away the right to retire. They were particularly fired up when presidential candidate Mitt Romney chose Paul Ryan as his running mate. Ryan's budget ideas would undermine Social Security as well as Medicare and Medicaid.

Romney and Ryan claim that their proposals would not detract from present retirees, but only lower benefits for younger people. The North Texas protesters called that maneuver an attempt to divide seniors from their own children and grandchildren.

People's World editor Tim Wheeler to be honored

By Les Bayless

On Sept. 9, family and friends will honor Baltimore's "Renaissance Man" - veteran peoplesworld.org journalist Tim Wheeler.

Tickets are \$30. Proceeds will benefit peoplesworld.org.

Tim was the Washington correspondent, and later, editor for the Daily World and its successor, the Peoples' World, for 45 years.

During Tim's career he wrote about the most important stories of the day, from Watergate and Nixon's impeachment to the Iran-Contra scandal to issues making today's headlines. You were as likely to find Tim on the picket line or at a demonstration as you were at his office on Capitol Hill.

Tim knew instinctively that the needs and views of working people weren't reflected in the mainstream press.

He saw the need to report on those stories that would never find a place in the New York Times.

This is what defined him as a working-class journalist.

But to family and close friends, Tim is much more than a journalist and activist; he is a Renaissance Man, able to do many things well and enjoying every challenge.

Tim is a musician and singer. He would often sit on his front porch, playing the Autoharp and singing folk songs. The neighborhood kids would gather around to listen. When a neighborhood boy named Gerald died tragically in a fire, Tim wrote a touching poem celebrating the boy's life.

Many a living room in Baltimore is adorned by one of Tim's pastels, which he would give away or have auctioned at a fundraiser for his favorite newspaper.

Long family road trips across the country gave Tim all the landscapes any painter could desire.

Tim is more than adequate with a power saw, hammer, or electric drill, doing much of his own repair work around the house, always with a project when time allowed.

At a birthday party at his Northeast Baltimore Home, the whole neighborhood joined Joyce and the family on the back porch for hot barbecue and a cold beer or soda. One of the treats was a slice of Tim's made-from-scratch peach or rhubarb pies.

Though gentle by nature (often deferring to Joyce when it came time to discipline his sons and daughter), Tim wasn't afraid of confrontation.

One day two tall FBI agents came to the house, banging on the door, trying to intimidate the family.

Tim pulled up a chair, jumped up on it and gave the agents what for until they left with their tail between their legs.

If you would like to make a contribution or buy a ticket you can send a check or money order payable to Les Bayless, a Tribute Committee member, and mail to 5303 Kenwood Ave., Baltimore, MD 21206. Please include a note as to whether the money is for a ticket, ad or donation.

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