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Obama charts progressive course for America

By John Wojcik

More than a million people gathered on the National Mall, Monday, to witness President Obama's second inauguration. It was the second largest inauguration in U.S. history - the largest was Obama's first in 2009 when 2 million people jammed the nation's capital.

Looking out at a sea of humanity, Obama delivered what is widely being described as a progressive call to action based on the theme that the nation is stronger when people act together. "We have always understood," the president declared, "that preserving our individual freedoms requires collective action."

"For the American people can no more meet the demands of today's world by acting alone. No single person can train all the math and science teachers we'll need to equip our children for the future, or build the roads and networks and research labs that will bring new jobs and businesses to our shores. Now, more than ever, we must do these things together, as one nation and one people."

The president gave a ringing endorsement to the majorities in poll after poll who have backed the nation's social insurance programs. He delivered an undisguised slap at the "makers" versus "takers" language of Congressional Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan and GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

"We do not believe that in this country freedom is reserved for the lucky, or happiness for the few," Obama said. "We recognize that no matter how responsibly we live our lives, any one of us



at any time may face a job loss, or a sudden illness, or a home swept away in a terrible storm. The commitments we make to each other through Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security, these things do not sap our initiative, they strengthen us. They do not make us a nation of takers; they free us to take the risks that make this country great."

The president made it clear that he supports extending and deepening civil and human rights.

"For our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and daughters can earn a liv-

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ing equal to their efforts," he said.

"Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else

Obama delivered what is widely being described as a progressive call to action.

under the law - for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well.

“Our journey is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote.

“Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as the land of opportunity.

“Our journey is not complete until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country.

“Our journey is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know they are cared for, and cherished, and always safe from harm.”

An overarching theme of the president’s speech was that a progressive agenda actually furthers the intent of the founding fathers.

For the climate change deniers he had three short but equally powerful sentences: “Some may deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but

none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires, and crippling drought, and more powerful storms. The path towards sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult. But America cannot resist this transition, we must lead it.”

Obama made no mention of ending the use of drones.

He did, however, contradict the neoconservatives and backers of the old Bush doctrine. Rather than just offer the usual platitudes presidents have uttered about wanting “peace,” Obama declared forcefully that national security and lasting peace do not require, as he put it, “perpetual war.”

The president notably refrained from any mention of Iran and Israel. Republicans have, for more than a year now, stepped up their rhetoric against Iran and have claimed, despite growing peace sentiment in Israel, that their support for military action against Iran is aimed at “protecting” Israel.



John Wojcik is PW Labor Editor.

Support the Mississippi Nissan Workers

PW Editorial

With Detroit’s huge North American International Auto Show taking place a block away, the Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan (MAFFAN), an organization representing clergy, elected officials, civil rights activists and students, recently held a press conference to emphasize how the auto giant is unfairly treating its 3,300 workers at its Canton, Mississippi plant.

They were joined by labor, civil rights activists and actor, Danny Glover.

Mississippi NAACP President Derrick Johnson said, “in Mississippi we have struggled far too long, far too hard, for disenfranchised workers to have a voice. If Nissan allows its workers in Japan, France and Israel to organize, why shouldn’t workers here have the same rights?”

When the Canton workers began to organize with the United Auto Workers (UAW), plant worker Morris Mock said Nissan responded by showing anti-union videos and implying “the factory is going to shut down” if the union came in.

Mock, who started at the plant when it first opened ten years ago, said, “All we want is a fair election.”

Glover said while auto manufacturers are unveiling their “new models” we are expected to buy,

there has to be a “new model of engagement” with Nissan workers “centered around fairness, justice, and focused on raising the standard of living for workers in Mississippi.”

Reverend R. Isiac Jackson Jr., President of the General Missionary Baptist State Convention of Mississippi and Chair of MAFFAN said it was outrageous in a state where voting was long oppressed, for Nissan to come and again say “you don’t have the right to choose.”

He noted when Nissan first came to Mississippi they were given all kinds of tax breaks because of their promise to provide full-time jobs. However since 2006, those being hired at the plant are temporary workers. What’s “strange” said Jackson is that Nissan pays the temp agency \$24.00 for each worker hired while the workers receive only \$12.00. “Why can’t Nissan hire employees straight out and pay them the \$24,” he asked.

Mock, said Nissan workers from Japan to South Africa are behind us “100 percent.”

“We have global support. It’s a great feeling to have rest of world behind us.”

All across the U.S. supports of justice, collective bargaining and a living wage are behind them as well. Solidarity forever!

They were joined by labor, civil rights activists and actor Danny Glover.

Labor and allies honor King and defend workers

By Ben Sears

The word went out from Independence Mall in Philadelphia that the nationwide assault on public services and public workers is meeting resistance on a new level. Several thousand union members, community activists, public school students and parents gathered to celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King and to hear speakers from the labor, education, and religious communities.

Many consider Philadelphia “ground zero” in the fight to save and improve public education and public services. The city’s two major AFSCME locals have been without new contracts for over three years, and the workforce is becoming increasingly disillusioned and angry with Mayor Michael Nutter and his attitude toward negotiations.

Pete Matthews, president of District Council 33, which represents 10,000 blue collar city workers, said that the Mayor had told his workers four years ago that he needed their help and that they had helped him balance four annual budgets since that time. Now the Mayor refuses to negotiate with the union and has made a unilateral “final offer” which the union considers “insulting” and can hardly take seriously.

“We are under siege right now,” Matthews told the crowd. “Mayor Nutter came to our general membership meeting four years ago and promised us fair treatment. Now he is attacking everything that makes our communities strong. He said we were holding the city of Philadelphia hostage, but we are the ones being held hostage. We say to the Mayor: ‘Keep your word.’ We are not giving back a thing.”

Cathy Scott, President of AFSCME District Council 47, representing 3,000 white collar city workers, told the crowd that her members had been without raises for over four years, despite making numerous suggestions for ways to raise revenue without raising taxes. She said it was now clear that Mayor Nutter is part of a national agenda to attack public service and drive down wages.

Noting the size of the crowd, she said, “No more will he be able to say he represents the 99



percent on the national stage while he plays the grinch here in Philadelphia.” She told the Peoples World before the rally that her union had been pressing the city negotiators, so far without success, to explain how they do their “costing out” when they claim they save millions by contracting out services.

AFSCME national President Lee Saunders captured the spirit of the day when he asked, “Isn’t it ironic that Dr. King gave his life in the struggle for the dignity of sanitation workers, and in 2012 we have a mayor who does not respect that struggle? Isn’t it ironic that President Barack Obama believes in the right of working people to bargain collectively while Michael Nutter supports the wealthy in this city? Your fight in Philadelphia is the fight of the 1.6 million members of AFSCME who will not rest until you get a fair contract.”

This city is also the scene of a building struggle over the future of public education, and unity among school workers, students, parents and community activists has grown in the face of threats by the local school authorities, supported by the Mayor, to privatize large sections of the District.

The School District has announced plans to close 37 schools at the end of the current school year. The PCAPs coalition has put forward the demand for a moratorium on school closings, and it was announced at the rally that City Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell planned to introduce a resolution in Council in support of a moratorium.

Many consider Philadelphia “ground zero” in the fight to save and improve public education and public services.

Move to expand Medicaid

By Tony Pecinovsky

We have an opportunity to expand Medicaid here in Missouri. We have an opportunity to give security to over 250,000 people who currently do not have health care," professor Sidney Watson told about 150 faith, labor, and community allies as they gathered to announce the kick-off of a new state-wide Medicaid coalition at the Kirkwood Baptist Church Jan. 16.

Watson, who teaches at St. Louis University's School of Law, added, "Missouri has the stingiest Medicaid program in the country."

"If you work you can't get Medicaid in Missouri," Watson continued.

According to the coalition, a single mother with two children does not qualify for Medicaid if she makes more than \$3,504 per-year, or about \$292 per month.

Judith Gallagher, a nurse at Grace Hill Community Health Center, agreed with Watson, and added, many of the "uninsured are working two or three part-time, low-paying jobs."

Contrary to popular belief, she added, "They aren't trying to get a free ride from hardworking tax payers. They are hardworking taxpayers. They just can't afford insurance."

According to the Missouri Medicaid Coalition, 877,000 Missourians currently have no health insurance. Expanding Medicaid, they say, would give 255,000 low-income people access to quality, affordable health care.

Watson added, "In twenty-one rural counties Medicaid expansion will cover over 10 percent of the population."

Additionally, they estimate that expanding Medicaid would create over 24,000 new jobs in the Show-Me-State, and save the state \$348 million per-year as Missouri would no longer have to pay its share for treating the uninsured.

Presidente Obama juramenta su cargo en ceremonia pública

Por Prensa Latina

El presidente de Estados Unidos, Barack Obama, y el vicepresidente, Joseph Biden, juramentaron sus cargos hoy en ceremonia pública frente a la sede del Congreso federal.

Ambos dignatarios habían hecho sus juramentos la víspera, en la fecha que establece la Constitución, en un breve acto en la Casa Blanca y en el Observatorio Naval, sus respectivas residencias oficiales.

El evento de este lunes estuvo precedido por una ceremonia religiosa en la Iglesia capitalina de Saint John.

El mandatario, reelecto en las elecciones del 6 de noviembre, juró su cargo ante el presidente del Tribunal Supremo de Justicia, John Roberts, mientras Biden lo hizo frente a la jueza de ese máximo órgano Sonia Sotomayor.

Obama, Biden y la comitiva que los acompaña desfilarán desde el Capitolio hasta la Casa Blanca.

Fuentes oficiales estiman que alrededor de 700 mil personas presenciaron la ceremonia, mucho menos de los casi dos millones que participaron en la investidura en 2009.

En su discurso, matizado por apelaciones al patriotismo, Obama intentó dar confianza a los ciudadanos ante las dificultades económicas y sociales que afectan a la nación nortea, así como frente los retos de su Gobierno en la arena internacional en los próximos cuatro años.

El mandatario demócrata inició su segundo mandato en medio de la polémica acerca del creciente nivel de violencia y los controles a la venta y posesión de armas de fuego, aspecto en el que la oposición conservadora bloquea algunas de las medidas limi-

tadas que el Ejecutivo trata de implantar.

Las secuelas del tiroteo en diciembre pasado en una escuela primaria de Newtown, estado de Connecticut, donde murieron 20 niños y seis adultos, añadió el control de las armas de fuego a la abultada agenda legislativa, señala hoy el diario The Washington Post.

Las discusiones en torno al límite de la deuda pública, las reducciones presupuestarias y la necesidad de implementar una reforma migratoria integral, son otras de las prioridades más presionantes del jefe de la Oficina Oval.

En materia de política exterior, la retirada de las tropas de Afganistán a partir de diciembre de 2014 y el volumen y misiones de las tropas que permanecerán en el país asiático después de esa fecha, también están en la lista del jefe de la Casa Blanca.

Las discusiones aún por realizar en el Capitolio en torno al manejo de la respuesta al atentado contra el consulado estadounidense en Bengasi en septiembre pasado, constituyen otra tarea pendiente de la actual administración, destacan medios de prensa en esta capital.

En otras noticias, el liderazgo republicano en la Cámara Representantes de Estados Unidos presentó un proyecto para suspender el límite de la deuda pública norteamericana hasta el 19 de mayo próximo.

La propuesta, que será sometida a votación el próximo miércoles en ese cuerpo legislativo, prevé que a partir de esa fecha el techo del débito gubernamental, de 16,4 billones de dólares, pueda incrementarse automáticamente para adaptarse a cualquier crédito adicional en ese período.