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Millions make change

By Sam Webb

The two main eras of progressive change in our country in the last century were accompanied by a broad and spirited upsurge of people.

In the Depression years, a powerful people's movement, in the forefront of which was the working class and its organized sector (trade unions), crystallized into a mighty force for social progress. It was the backbone of a series of people's legislative victories - Social Security, unemployment insurance, welfare benefits, the right to organize into unions, etc.

Three decades later a movement led by Martin Luther King broke the back of legal segregation and enacted civil rights laws, while at the same time inspiring a host of popular struggles that followed on its heels.

Both movements - of the 1930s and the 1960s - were diverse, mass, militant and spontaneous as well as organized. Both combined political action and mass action. And both, as mentioned, were decisive to the change process specific to their era.

In other words, had they not been on the scene at the time, progressive change would either not have occurred or occurred in a much more limited way.

Which brings me to the present. Following



the recent debt agreement between the president and the Republicans, progressive and left voices were critical of the administration. Many felt that it gave up too much and got little in return.

There is truth here, but I'm not sure if that is main lesson that should be drawn from this deal.

For me what stands out is the inadequate mobilization of the American people in this struggle. To be sure, the seniors movement left its imprint on the process in so far as entitlement programs were not touched for the time being. But that shouldn't obscure the larger reality that too many

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Americans were onlookers, waiting to see what would happen behind closed doors in the nation's capital.

The political imperative of this moment, therefore, is clear.

If this were a problem specific to only this struggle, it would be one thing, but it isn't. It dates back to the day after the election of Obama.

For whatever reasons, the level of mass activity at the national level hasn't approached that which took shape in the course of the 2008 election campaign. During the campaign mass activity was broad, grassroots, united and sustained over time. It brought millions into organized activity as well as influenced the thinking and actions of many more millions who went to the polls.

But it didn't carry over to the post-election period. And in not doing so it reduced the progressive potential of the Obama victory since then.

Social progress without mass pressure is never easy in a capitalist system. Capitalism is structured to resist change of a progressive and radical nature. But it is especially tough going in circumstances where the right wing controls many levers of power, as it currently does.

Indeed, without a powerful people's move-

ment mobilizing millions and advancing a program of a progressive character, the political discourse will tack to the right and legislative victories will be few and far between, as in the present situation.

The political imperative of this moment, therefore, is clear: the quantitative and qualitative strengthening of the people's movement for progressive change.

Whether it happens depends on the human factor, that is, on what ordinary people do. Just as the initiatives and actions of the American people were an essential ingredient in the progressive-democratic thrust in the 1930s and 1960s, so too will the initiatives and actions of millions feeling the awful weight of this terrible and protracted economic crisis be essential in today's conditions.

Seize the time!



Sam Webb is chair of the Communist Party USA.

The massacre at Ishaqi, Iraq

By PW Editorial Board

The recent release by Wikileaks of a U.S. diplomatic cable, which sheds new light on a 2006 attack in which U.S. troops massacred at least 10 civilians, is riveting attention on the horrors visited on innocent civilians by the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In March 2006, U.S. troops raided a house in Ishaqi, Iraq, killing at least 10 civilians, including four women and five children under five years of age. The troops claimed they called in airstrikes that destroyed the house where an al Qaida in Iraq leader was hiding.

But a report by a regional security center staffed by U.S.-trained Iraqi police - and Iraqi civilian eyewitnesses - said U.S. troops entered the house and killed the civilians before calling in the airstrikes. Autopsies showed all had been handcuffed and then shot.

The raid came just months after a widely publicized November 2005 incident in which U.S. Marines killed two dozen Iraqis in Haditha, in northern Iraq, including at least 15 civilians. (After extensive legal proceedings charges were dropped against all but one of the Marines accused in the incident.)

In July 2007, in a raid over a Baghdad suburb, U.S. airmen killed a dozen Iraqis, including two who worked for Reuters News Agency, falsely

claiming they encountered a firefight. A secretly made video of the raid, showing airmen laughing after the killings, was later released by Wikileaks. Its release is among allegations against the now-jailed Bradley Manning.

As we know, these and other highly publicized incidents are just the tip of the iceberg. Many thousands of Iraqi and Afghan civilians have become "collateral damage" since U.S. forces first invaded those countries starting nearly a decade ago.

The most fundamental thing, of course, is to end those wars and bring all U.S. troops and contractors home. The Obama administration has taken steps in that direction, by ending U.S. troops' combat role in Iraq, and ordering withdrawal of 33,000 U.S. soldiers from Afghanistan.

But these steps are just the start, and are being undermined by pressure from the Pentagon and others to retain large numbers of troops and contractors in both countries long-term.

All of us among the large majority of Americans opposing the wars need to step up vigorous actions to end them.

At the same time, an investigation by a high-level independent commission, of all these incidents and many more, in both Iraq and Afghanistan is urgently needed.

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Workers blast threat to shut down U.S. Postal Service

By John Wojcik

Postal Service employees say threats by the U.S. Postal Service to shut down this winter because of a \$9.2 billion deficit are part of a “manufactured crisis” designed to privatize the world’s largest mail delivery system.

“This crisis was created by Congress and the Postal Service back in 2006,” said Jeff Levitt, an Albany, N.Y. postal worker. “Unlike any other corporate entity, the U.S. Postal service was then required to pre-fund future health care costs, forcing it to take \$3 to \$5 billion dollars a year out of receipts for stamps.”

Levitt and others charge that the resulting artificial deficit has been, and is being used to cut back on days of delivery, length of time allowed for processing and delivery of mail and other services.

“Our situation is extremely serious,” Postmaster General Patrick Donahue announced to the press today. Donahue was a leading advocate for cuts recently that would end Saturday mail delivery, close 3,700 post offices and lay off 120,000 employees, about 20 percent of the Postal Service workforce.

Without emergency congressional action, by early next year the agency could run out of money to pay workers and fill the gas tanks in its delivery vehicles.. That would halt the weekly delivery of three billion pieces of mail.

Republicans, as usual, are expected to make things even more difficult. While many of them would vote to cut Saturday delivery, for example, there are those in Congress who have resisted Postal Service management requests to do that.

The GOP is not expected to allow the Postal Service the same leeway it gives private corporations. It is also not expected to grant federal funds to the service to keep it going.

Kaufmann, another Albany Postal Service



worker, charged that management has already gone to the government, asking that the Postal Service be let off its contractual obligations so it can lay off those 125,000 workers. Donahue is claiming the contract should be nullified because it does not allow layoffs and that it does not provide relief when management has to pay higher labor costs.

“This is nothing more than a back door attempt to privatize,” said Leavitt. “They have already tried to dismantle service.”

In recent years the Postal Service turn over of Priority Mail to UPS, a private company, was a dismal failure, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Workers say the privatization schemes are beneficial only to a small group of investors, not to the general public.

Supporters of a government-run postal service argue that it should be run, not as a corporation but as a necessary public service. They note that Americans have been able to count on postal service since the founding of the nation.

The U.S. Postal Service traces its roots back to the U.S. constitution,, which provided for the creation of a national mail delivery system.

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Chicago rally for teachers

By Scott Marshall

Teachers, steelworkers, electricians, firefighters and other union members, their families and supporters, rallied in Chicago on the Southeast Side to defend teachers and union rights. The rally included a caravan of union members from Madison, Wisc., who are themselves locked in a battle to defend labor and human rights.

Chicago's new mayor, Rahm Emanuel, and his administration have launched an attack on labor rights and working conditions in an effort to balance the city budget on the backs of union workers. The city's clash with the teachers union is front and center in this effort.

Sue Garza, a Chicago Teachers Union member at the neighborhood Jane Addams Elementary School, was one of the main organizers of the rally. It was held next to her home on a blocked off street. Friends and neighbors donated food and beverages for the event. Speakers spoke from the back of a flatbed truck.

Garza urged those in attendance to organize block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, to defend and build support for teachers, public workers, unions and all working people.

Union workers' fighting back is not a new theme for Chicago's Southeast Side. The infamous Memorial Day Massacre of 1937 took place here. Ten steelworkers were gunned down and killed, and another 90 injured at the gates of Republic Steel.

Wisconsin Sen. Robert LaFollette, Jr., chair of the Civil Liberties Committee used Congressional hearings to expose the anti-union violence promoted and organized by Republic Steel. Eventually the reaction to this horrible slaughter of peaceful union demonstrators helped lead to the successful organizing of Republic and other "Little Steel" companies by the United Steelworkers.

Las grandes compañías promueven la obesidad de menores

Por Thomas Riggins

Cualquier gobierno democrático tiene la responsabilidad de proteger la salud y el bienestar de sus ciudadanos y especialmente el prevenir que los intereses de nuestros menores sean explotados por el sector privado para su ganancia y cualquier otra razón. Esto podrá sonar como algo lógico, pero los gobiernos del mundo, incluyendo los Estados Unidos de Norte América, han sido muy flexibles en permitirle a estas compañías la manufactura, propaganda y venta de alimentos para nuestros menores, a pesar de que conocen los daños a la salud y las consecuencias que éstos les ocasionarán en el futuro.

De acuerdo con Science Daily, los científicos ha demostrado que menores que ven programas televisivos que promueven el consumo de comidas que dañan la salud han desarrollado un deseo a consumir estas comidas en vez de comidas alternas que son más saludables y nutritivas.

En el estudio participaron menores de seis a trece años que fueron expuestos a una serie de dibujos animados y después expuestos a cinco minutos de propaganda que promovía publicidad de juguetes o cinco minutos de publicidad sobre alimentos chatarra. En seguida, los menores fueron permitidos escoger que tipo de comidas querían de unas listas que incluían comidas saludables y chatarra, incluyendo famosas marcas y nombres de alimentos populares. Los menores optaron significativamente por consumir alimentos chatarra después de ver dichos anuncios, pero no después de los anuncios de juguetes.

Emma Boyland, una de las autoras del estudio, dijo, "La obesidad de menores es hoy en día una de las mayores preocupaciones alrededor del mundo."

Nuestros gobiernos deberán prohibir dichos anuncios que son destinados a menores. También deben de evitar la producción y venta de dicha comida chatarra en su totalidad. El propósito de la alimentación es el de proveer de una nutrición saludable a los consumidores de dichos alimentos, no para enriquecer a las corporaciones. Es simplemente irracional e inmoral el permitir a compañías privadas enriquecerse por hacer obesos e insaludables a millones de niños alrededor del mundo.

Ella argumenta que limitando el tiempo que los menores dedican a ver televisión podría ser una solución ya que sólo menores que vieron la televisión por más de 21 horas mostraron ser afectados negativamente por los anuncios de alimentos.

Cualquier sea el caso, Boyland concluye diciendo, "Este estudio demuestra que los menores son mucho más propensos a comer comida chatarra si ven mucha televisión. Esto sugiere que sería beneficioso reducir la cantidad de televisión que los menores ven. Estos hallazgos también implican que debe regularse la publicidad que promueve alimentos para menores."

Esto sería un buen comienzo, pero a la vez, un gobierno que realmente se preocupa por su gente implementaría una prohibición de todos los productos de comida chatarra en primer lugar.

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