

Poor People's Campaign hearse spotlights death of voting rights



By Mark Gruenberg

When the Poor People's Campaign completes its 27-mile four-day trek through the Texas heat on July 31, and ends at the state capitol building in Austin, a hearse will lead the way.

In its coffin will be copies of 400-plus GOP bills from radical rightists, filed in 48 states, killing voting rights—including the draconian measure Texas's ruling Republicans seek to impose on Black and Brown people in the Lone Star State.

And behind the hearse, carrying the marchers on their final leg of the journey, will be 151 cars, symbolizing the 151 years since Congress enacted the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which declares "The right to vote in the U. S. or any state shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, color, creed or previous condition of servitude."

The hearse appearing in Austin will be the latest development in a month-long campaign of peaceful protests, civil disobedience and occasional peaceful arrests of voting rights marchers.

The campaign will reach one peak on August 2 in D.C., but other events will follow, until Congress rights the wrong and restores and strengthens the right to vote—and takes other measures to aid the nation's 140 million poor.

"Texas is like the canary in the coal mine" for the rest of the U.S. on voter suppression, thus violating

the Constitution, says the Rev. William Barber II, founder and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign.

But this time, Barber's "army," to use another speaker's word, is battling against state repression of voting rights and for congressional passage of the For The People Act, nationwide. It staged demonstrations for those twin causes in dozens of state capitals on July 26, too.

The For The People Act would make voting easier, more-transparent and more representative of real

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voters. It would also lessen—if not remove—the political clout of corporate special interests. It also would override all the GOP and racist-pushed state voter repression statutes.

On July 31, speakers will be a long line of Texans, "will be those impacted" by the state GOP's current

In its coffin, carried in a 27-mile trek in Texas heat, will be copies of 400-plus GOP bills aimed at killing voting rights in 48 states.

and planned voter suppression laws, said Barber.

“Every day we wake up to attacks, an eviction crisis, attacks on Black people, poor people, on immigrants, and the denial of Medicare and Medicaid to them,” said Texas Poor People’s Campaign co-chair Stephanie Swanson. That includes environmental attacks on the poor, she added: “I grew up close to the Houston Ship Channel,” which is lined with polluting refineries. “I had lung cancer at age 33.”

The Texas trek starts today, July 27. Yesterday, Barber, his co-chair, the Rev. Liz Theoharis and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the longtime civil rights leader, focused on federal voting rights legislation in a Phoenix, Ariz., event. There, they campaigned for the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, and the For The People Act (HR1/S1).

Like other Poor People’s Campaign actions, the Tucson event drew union and worker support. The Communications Workers, the Arizona AFL-CIO, the state’s Working Families Party were among the

groups supporting, sending participants, or both.

The demonstration was outside and inside the Tucson office of Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz. She’s a Democratic fence-sitter on the For The People Act. Sinema also supports retaining the filibuster, the racist-inspired Senate rule which allows right-wing Republicans to kill legislation—including the For The People Act and the Protect The Right To Organize Act—just by threatening to talk it to death.

“Any politician supporting the filibuster is standing with the Chamber of Commerce,” Barber said.

For their peaceful sit-in at Sinema’s office, Barber, Theoharis, Jackson and others were arrested and put in handcuffs after their rally, march and protest.

“This war on democracy and truth,” including the war on voting rights for Blacks, browns, women, youth and the poor “has been declared by the relatives of the secessionists who tried to overthrow our democracy” by invading the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, the Rev. Frederick Douglass Haynes III of the National Baptist Convention said.

Simone Biles carries weight of the world on her shoulders

By Al Neal

As she walked into the Ariake Gymnastics Centre in Tokyo, sporting a shimmering red, white, blue leotard and a white ribbon tied in her hair Tuesday night, Simone Biles, 24, knew she was carrying “the weight of the world” on her shoulders.

As the face of U.S. Gymnastics Olympic team—and the Summer Games in Tokyo—she was burdened by the U.S.’s hopes of another gold medal.

Undeniably, Biles is the greatest gymnast of all time and an outspoken advocate for female athletes. But she is also a human being who struggles under constant outside pressure—as we all do.

For Biles, that moment came after she completed her opening rotation on the vault. She walked off the floor with her trainers, threw on her white sweatsuit, took off her bar grips, and ended the evening cheering on her teammates.

Biles will not defend her Olympic title. Instead, she will focus on her mental well-being.

USA Gymnastics said in a statement Tuesday that Biles “made the difficult decision to withdraw for her mental and physical well-being.”

Biles’, a four-time Olympic gold medalist, candid statement puts a spotlight on mental health in

professional sports.

“Put mental health first, because if you don’t, then you’re not going to enjoy your sport, and you’re not going to succeed as much as you want to,” she said. “So, it’s OK sometimes to even sit out the big competitions to focus on yourself, because it shows how strong of a competitor you are, rather than just battle through it.”

Olympic competition aside, the unusual factor impacting this year’s summer games, the pandemic, has been detrimental to athlete well-being.

Aside from it, the growing list of keyboard warriors attacking top-level female athletes for being human. The litany of tweets against Biles boils down to this: “she’s a quitter,” “She’s selfish, “she’s teaching little girls to be weak.”

And if your thoughts about Biles’ decision led you to think that “she should have toughened up” and kept going, I’ve got news for you.

It takes more courage to admit when you’re struggling. And it’s best to keep quiet.

Biles, and other athletes, will go down as heroes for destigmatizing issues of mental health.

So just remember, it’s ok, to not be ok. To hell with those social expectations.

Greatest gymnast of all time an outspoken advocate for the female athletes of the world.

House bill targets PFAS ‘forever chemicals’ in drinking water



By Andrew Wright

The U.S. House passed the “Dingell bill” last Wednesday that would regulate toxic chemicals in drinking water—and given Michigan’s polluted history, the measure could have a major impact in the state. The chemicals in question are per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS. Also known by the moniker “forever chemicals,” PFAS are used in non-stick cookware, stain repellants, and pizza boxes to name but a few everyday items.

U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell of Michigan, the measure’s primary sponsor, stated that “PFAS chemicals are an urgent threat to public health... Now almost every American has PFAS coursing through their blood after generations of using the chemicals.” PFAS contamination has been linked to high cholesterol, thyroid disease, low infant birth weights, and various cancers.

The Biden administration came out in support of the bill, as clean water was one of Biden’s “top priorities” when campaigning for his presidency.

Should the bill pass the Senate, the EPA will then need to make a decision on drinking water standards and whether or not to “regulate the entire class” of PFAS—which ranges from 5,000 to 7,000 different substances.

In Michigan, groundwater is currently being tested in the Oscoda area by the Air Force and state response teams such as Michigan PFAS Action Response Team, or MPART. The decommissioned

Wurtsmith Air Force Base was known to have high levels of PFAS contamination over a decade ago. One of the causes of this contamination is firefighting foam.

The World Health Organization pointed out more than two years ago that half the world’s population will be living in “water-stressed areas” by 2025, and we are already at the point where only 1 in 3 people have access to safe, drinkable water. According to Water.org, this water crisis disproportionately affects women and children.

Michigan is not the only state fighting the battle for uncontaminated water and environmental cleanup. There is a long history of corporations and politicians not being held accountable for the poisoning of large populations of people. Although everyone remembers the recent Flint water crisis, there are numerous cases of similar contamination of residential areas and environmental racism.

These issues, which undoubtedly harbor larger, catastrophic ecological potential, are at least finally being taken seriously on a state and national scale. The fact that they’re finally being taken seriously bears witness to the fact that you cannot get away with poisoning working-class neighborhoods, predominantly Black cities, or minority communities without eventually confronting the direct consequences of this environmental terror.

PFAS are used in non-stick cookware, stain repellants, and pizza boxes to name but a few everyday items.

Tunisia in turmoil after president dissolves parliament

By Morning Star

Tunisia has been plunged into turmoil by President Kais Saied dissolving parliament and sacking prime minister Hichem Mechichi following a day of mass protests.

This move sparked celebrations on the streets of the capital Tunis, as Mr. Saied said that he would rule with the support of a new prime minister.

“Many people were deceived by hypocrisy, treachery and robbery of the rights of the people,” he said in a statement.

“I warn any who think of resorting to weapons ... and whoever shoots a bullet [that] the armed forces will respond with bullets,” he added.

Mr. Saied said his actions were in line with Tunisia’s constitution, which divides power between the president, parliament and PM. He also lifted legislators’ immunity from prosecution “to restore social peace, save the state and society.”

But his opponents, the Islamist party that dominates parliament, accused Mr. Saied of carrying out “a coup against the revolution.”

Tunisians are also angry about the Covid-19 pandemic, with more than 18,000 of the country’s 12 million people having died from the virus.

Mr. Mechichi, elected prime minister in 2019, had faced demands for his resignation from protesters defending state secularism.

Police stormed the Al Jazeera offices in Tunis today and expelled journalists, under orders from the judiciary. Phones, laptops and other equipment was seized during the raid, which reporters said had been carried out without a warrant.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has condemned the raid.

La crisis climática mundial causa estragos

By Blake Skylar

Las inundaciones causadas por el calentamiento global en Alemania han dejado 108 muertos y al menos 1.300 desaparecidos. La tragedia es la última de un patrón de desastres naturales en todo el mundo, lo que pone de relieve la terrible realidad de que los devastadores fenómenos meteorológicos continuarán y empeorarán debido al cambio climático.

Días antes de que las olas turbias azotaran la parte occidental del país, los expertos en clima predijeron las inundaciones extremas, luego de que los modelos mostraran tormentas que se espera que produzcan niveles masivos de agua. Para el 16 de julio, estas predicciones sonaron desastrosamente ciertas, con imágenes de noticias que mostraban una destrucción generalizada y familias desesperadas atrapadas en los tejados a la espera de un rescate.

“Esta es una tragedia nacional”, dijo la ministra de Medio Ambiente, Svenja Schulze. “Estos son los precursores del cambio climático, que ahora ha llegado a Alemania. El desastre de la inundación mostró la fuerza con la que podría afectarnos a todos”.

En una aldea, 12 personas que vivían en un hogar de vida asistida se ahogaron debido a las inundaciones. Los vecinos comentaron que podían escuchar sus gritos mientras morían. Los operadores de la instalación dijeron que del total de 13 residentes que habían desaparecido de las instalaciones, solo uno fue encontrado con vida. Se observó que un miembro del personal intentó trasladar a varios ocupantes de la casa al primer piso cuando el agua entró en el edificio, pero cuando el trabajador trató de ll-

evar al resto a un lugar seguro, fueron arrastrados por el violento diluvio.

Las violentas aguas que consumieron la vida de tantos pueden seguir teniendo un efecto dominó duradero, incluso en el ámbito de la política, donde el fenómeno meteorológico podría afectar las elecciones de otoño de Alemania. La Unión Demócrata Cristiana, el partido de la canciller Angela Merkel, podría perder apoyo, y el país posiblemente seleccione a los Verdes sobre la CDU.

Durante su última visita a Estados Unidos, Merkel se reunió con el presidente Biden, siendo el calentamiento global uno de los puntos clave de la agenda. Planearon lanzar una asociación climática conjunta, que apuntará a una reducción de las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero a cero en las economías de EE. UU. Y Alemania a más tardar en 2050.

La empresa es uno de los muchos planes ambientales de la asediada Administración Biden, que continúa lidiando con un Partido Republicano que niega el cambio climático, un partido que se resiste obstinadamente a cualquier proyecto de ley de infraestructura que crearía empleos verdes masivos. Continúan oponiéndose al Green New Deal por el que lucha la administración.

“Lo que está haciendo el cambio climático es alargar la temporada de incendios”, dijo Don Falk, profesor de la escuela de recursos naturales de la Universidad de Arizona. “No perdamos el tiempo y lo neguemos más, y miremos el problema directamente a la cara. No se puede poner una curita en este problema. No hay una solución sencilla hasta que te tomes en serio el cambio climático”.