

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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December 7, 2013

Ohio voters make progressive shift

By Bruce Bostick



Voters in Cincinnati, Ohio, by huge margin, turned down a tea party initiative that would've wiped out public worker's pensions in that city. As part of a larger, progressive wave that swept across the state and nation, Cincinnati became the first city in the nation to turn back one of these ALEC-inspired, anti-worker so-called "pension reform" initiatives.

Heavily funded by the extremist right-wing Liberty Initiative and National Taxpayer's Union, the Cincinnati ballot issue would've shut down that city's public worker's pension system, replacing it with 401 k funds. While other ballot measures, supporting the city and schools, passed easily, the tea party backed issue went down in flames, 79-21 percent.

The Cincinnati ballot issue showed a lineup of political forces that completely isolated the extreme right-wing tea party, a lineup that some national commentators have seen developing across the nation. Cincinnati's labor movement organized a massive campaign against the issue, mobilizing their members and friends, organizing phone banks, mailings and a huge door-to-door campaign. The faith community, represented by the Faith Alliance, campaigned against the issue. "I just want to thank all the AFL-CIO unions that mobilized people and especially the faith

groups," said Cincinnati AFL-CIO Executive Secretary Doug Sizemore. "I just can't tell you how proud I am of all the people here. When they saw all that outside money, all those extremist outside tea party folks coming in here, people knew they weren't coming here to help us out. It was just like SB 5, the same huge coalition. We beat them last year, now we've beat them in this fight and we'll beat them again if they try to push right to work on us!"

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"It was the unity of labor, with retirees and the community that won this fight," according to Bentley Davis, of the Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA). "If they'd been able to convince Cincinnatians to vote to wipe out worker's pensions, every other Ohio city would be next in line.

The tea party and right-wing extremists were soundly defeated in Ohio.

Our unity and the grassroots mobilization of real people stopped them in their tracks!”

Returns from major races across Ohio followed this pro-labor, progressive, trend. In Toledo, Mayor Michael Bell, a first-term African American Democrat and former unionist who’d switched sides to support SB 5, even making TV commercials to push the Republican legislature’s attack on Ohio’s public worker’s bargaining rights was soundly thrashed, 58-42 percent, by labor-supported Independent Michael Collins. Collins is also a unionist, the former president of Patrolmen’s Association, which is affiliated with the local AFL-CIO. Collins opposed SB 5 and has stated that he will stand against any attempt to pass so-called right-to-work legislation in the state and has pledged to treat workers fairly.

“Public workers are not the cause of the crisis we’re in,” stated George Tucker, Executive Secretary, Greater Northwest Ohio AFL-CIO. “Attacking working families, supporting SB 5 and right to work, like Bell was doing, harms us and hurts the whole economy. We’re glad that all the unions, the community of faith here and our friends agreed

that we’ve got to go in a better, more progressive, direction!”

“It was just like the SB 5 campaign,” said Toledo SOAR President Dave Bilski. “All the AFL-CIO unions helped out, and the UAW mobilized their folks also. People are finally waking up. These tea baggers want their own paychecks but want to cut Social Security and steal what we’ve all worked our whole lives to earn!”

Dayton followed the same trend, electing progressive Democrat Nan Whaley and a labor-supported slate of candidates to replace the outgoing conservative Republican administration in what has previously been a GOP leaning area. Whaley won the general election after winning a primary that featured two Democrats, when voters eliminated all Republicans from the run-off.

On the day after elections, Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown announced his support for S 567, the ‘Strengthen Social Security Act,’ which would raise the artificial cap on FICA taxes and require the wealthy to begin paying their fair share.



Bruce Bostick writes for Peoplesworld.org.

Obamacare: Grumbling is not enough

By PW Editorial Board

It is amazing how fast momentum can shift in politics. And it usually happens for reasons that could not have been predicted.

Case in point: only a month ago, the reckless shutdown of the federal government left its engineers -- the tea party and the Republican Party -- weakened, and the president and Democrats energized and with the wind at their back.

But this newly acquired momentum turned out to be far more momentary.. In fact, it lasted only a few days. Why? Because Republicans seized the opportunity provided by the big problems with the rollout of the Affordable Health Care Act. They were all over it, with the help of compliant corporate media.

Now, if the health insurance exchanges are running smoothly by the end of the year, as they appear to be in many states, much of the furor will die out. But if they aren’t, Obamacare will be turned by the far right into a metaphor for “broken government” and the prospects of unseating

Republicans in Congress and statehouses next fall will become problematic.

Which means that grumbling about the problems of the health care rollout heard in some progressive and left circles needs to give way to actively resisting the right wing’s campaign to kill Obamacare and regain the initiative leading into the midterm and 2016 elections.

With all its shortcomings, Obamacare is a step in the right direction; it extends health care - a social right - to millions who up to now have none, and partially curbs the power of the health care industry, while its defeat would set back the struggle for health care for all. That’s why the far right is fighting it so hard!

Thus, energizing, uniting, and raising the understanding of ever more people to oppose right-wing extremism in every arena of struggle - not least of which is defense of the AffordableCare Act - it’s the order of the day.

Defense of the Affordable Care Act is the order of the day.

Election mandate calls for unity and jobs

By Joelle Fishman

A huge multiracial crowd celebrated the victory of Toni Harp as New Haven's first woman African American mayor. Led here by New Haven Rising, unions of Yale University workers and community groups, hundreds of volunteers knocked on doors across the city this summer and fall to discuss issues and organize a large voter turnout. Labor-backed Harp won the primary and then went on to win the general election. In addition, the 20-member super-majority of union members and allies on the Board of Alders elected in 2011 was retained.

Also, charter revision to give residents a larger voice in government passed overwhelmingly. Two elected members were added to the mayor-appointed Board of Education, a civilian review board was established, 10 points were added for city residents who pass civil service exams, and mayoral appointments will be approved by the Board of Alders.

These victories have not come easy.

After two decades in office, outgoing Mayor John DeStefano decided not to run again, creating an open field with five candidates in the Democratic primary. Harp's candidacy was unanimously endorsed by the union/community alders. This led to a hot and heavy primary election filled with union-bashing and personal attacks against Harp, which were rejected by the majority of voters.

Opposition candidates organized as "Take Back New Haven" claimed the alders were controlled by a "union machine" from the suburbs. In fact, the alders who are union members were elected as a result of unprecedented outreach door to door in each ward, exactly the opposite



of a back-room machine. They have brought into the community the skills they learned representing co-workers on the job as service, maintenance, clerical and technical workers at Yale and as members of AFSCME and 1199. They are neighbors with as much stake in the future of the city as anyone else. Most are African American, many are women.

Harp, a former AFSCME Local 3144 member, said during the campaign, "AFSCME and I share a vision for a new New Haven. We share a vision of a New Haven that pays all workers fairly, that provides social services to the less fortunate, and guarantees all employees a secure retirement."

A longtime state senator with a strong progressive voting record, Harp came under attack for tax problems around her late husband's business. After she won the five-way Democratic primary, these attacks escalated in an apparent attempt to keep down the vote.

Harp's years of community service and her endorsements by legislators and the governor ensured her victory over Alder Justin Elicker who switched and ran independent after coming in second in the primary. His votes came primarily from wards with large white homeowner professional populations who liked his balanced budget program. Harp won with 54 percent of the vote.

New Haven activists are preparing for a new push to create jobs with livable wages and the right to a union.

LOCAL NEWS

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Landfill to become solar plant

By Blake Deppe

Staten Island's Fresh Kills Park - on the site of what is currently the world's largest landfill - will soon be the largest solar energy facility in the city. Once finished, the 47-acre plant, which will be leased to SunEdison, will consist of 35,000 solar panels and produce up to 10 megawatts of power - enough to energize about 2,000 homes.

The plan was announced Nov. 25 by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Parks Commissioner Veronica White, Sanitation Commissioner John Doherty, and Director of Long-Term Planning and Stability Sergej Mahnovski. "Soon Fresh Kills will be the site of the largest solar power installation ever developed within the five boroughs," Bloomberg said. "Thanks to the agreement today, we will increase the amount of solar energy produced in New York City by 50 percent, and it is only fitting that Fresh Kills, once a daily dumping ground, will become a showcase for urban renewal and sustainability."

The Fresh Kills development is seen as a major victory. Marcia Bystry, president of the New York League of Conservation Voters, said, "Not long ago, few could have imagined that Fresh Kills would be transformed into a clean energy facility. This is one of the most exciting clean energy projects in development in the entire city, and it will serve as a powerful symbol of the environmental renaissance now under way on Staten Island."

Familias latinas y los derechos de inmigrantes y LGBT

Por David Montez

Nos asociamos con GLAAD y Bendixen & Amadi International para hacer una de las primeras y seguramente más ambiciosos estudios para medir el apoyo latino a los derechos LGBT.

Los resultados fueron inspiradores:

El 80 por ciento de los latinos dijeron que creían que las personas gay a menudo enfrentan discriminación y el 83 por ciento de los latinos apoyaron protecciones contra la discriminación de vivienda y empleo.

El 74 por ciento de los latinos dijeron que apoyan el matrimonio o reconocimientos legales similares para las parejas gays y lesbianas.

El 75 por ciento de los latinos dijeron que apoyan las políticas escolares para prevenir el acoso y la intimidación de los estudiantes que son o son percibidos como gays o lesbianas.

Desde entonces, más estudios y encuestas han mostrado un fuerte apoyo latino para la igualdad del matrimonio, incluyendo una encuesta de 2013 por el Consejo Nacional de La Raza que mostró que el 54 por ciento de los encuestados apoya el matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo, en comparación con el 53 por ciento de la población general. Un estudio reciente realizado por el Public Religion Research Institute encontró que la mayoría (55 por ciento) de los hispanos favorecen permitir a los estadounidenses gays y lesbianas a contraer matrimonio.

Hoy, estoy agradecido de ver que el apoyo latino para las personas y cuestiones LGBT, ha seguido creciendo, no sólo con nuestras familias, sino también de los líderes de la comunidad latina y organizaciones nacionales como el Consejo Nacional de La Raza y LULAC - ambas se han pronunciado fuertemente a favor de la igualdad del matrimonio.

GLAAD es una de una serie de organizaciones LGBT aliada con la comunidad de derechos de los inmigrantes, que forma parte de una amplia coalición que lucha para asegurar una reforma comprensiva y un camino a la ciudadanía.

Puede que la reforma migratoria no suceda este año, pero eso no quiere decir que es una causa perdida. El proyecto de ley aprobado por el Senado está vivo hasta el final de este período de sesiones del Congreso, a finales de 2014.

Es por eso que ahora es el momento para que nuestras comunidades presionen más fuerte que nunca para garantizar que los millones de inmigrantes en nuestro país, incluyendo un estimado de 267 mil adultos indocumentados LGBT, estén plenamente integrados en nuestra sociedad, para que puedan ver a sus identidades como una bendición y una oportunidad para el crecimiento personal y comunitario.

GLAAD está comprometido a ser parte de este esfuerzo hasta el final.

David Montez es presidente interino de GLAAD.

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