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Nation rallies behind Walmart workers

By Marilyn Bechtel



They packed the sidewalk in front of the giant Walmart store on Hesperian Blvd., spilling out into the major commercial thoroughfare, drowning the sounds of passing traffic with their chants. Over 500 strong, they bore signs and banners from many unions and community organizations. The demonstration here, like many of those that took place around the country, was organized by the Organization United for Respect at Walmart, or OUR Walmart.

The nation rallied behind Walmart workers Nov. 29, turning the traditional Black Friday shopping day into mass protests at 1,500 locations across the country. Walmart workers, along with their backers, were arrested in at least nine cities for engaging in acts of peaceful civil disobedience, including blocking of parking lots and store entrances and sitting down in major thoroughfares near the stores.

Five protesters here were arrested and later released. The entirely nonviolent crowd here had surged into a road near the store, blocking it in one direction.

Many protesters said they are angry with the country's largest private employer for paying poverty wages to its workers, especially when it made \$17 billion in profits this year.

They demanded, too, that Walmart cease il-

legal retaliation against those of its employees fighting for better jobs, and applauded the recent announcement that the National Labor Relations Board decided to prosecute the retail giant for workers' rights violations.

Demonstrators here were emboldened by revelations from Walmart's CEO that 825,000 workers are paid less than \$25,000 a year while the Walton family's wealth totals over \$144 billion - equal to that of 42 percent of Americans.

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"We refuse to live in fear. And we refuse to accept scraps. That's why there have been so many strikes and protests this month," said Dorothy Halvorson, a Walmart employee in Placerbville, Calif., who has worked at the store for 11 years.

"We know that we are closer to change at

Walmart's new CEO may be forced to raise wages.

Walmart than ever before - and it's clear that Walmart knows it too. We won't stop protesting until we get change. This Black Friday is historic, and we will only grow stronger from here," she said. Among those arrested was former Walmart worker Pamela Davis, who said she was fired from the Hilltop Mall store in nearby Richmond, Calif., after she participated in an unfair labor practices strike.

"It's all about one thing: respect for Walmart workers, respect for all workers," Joe Hansen, international president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, told the crowd. "The UFCW is proud to stand with Walmart workers for decent wages and decent benefits."

UFCW Local 5 President Ron Lind called the action "the future of the labor movement, standing up for Walmart workers and fast food workers and other low-wage workers."

For many weeks now Walmart workers have been receiving support from religious and civil rights leaders too. The Rev. Jesse Jackson noted the "immense courage" of Walmart workers to engage in civil disobedience "for dignity, respect

and a decent wage," likening it to the earlier civil rights movement.

Citing recent media reports, state Sen. Ellen Corbett told the San Leandro crowd, "We want to make sure that next Thanksgiving, Walmart isn't putting out food bins to collect food for their workers!" San Leandro Vice Mayor Jim Prola pointed to the boost a wage increase for Walmart workers would give the entire economy, and called for a wage of \$15 an hour, with decent benefits."

Emceeding the event was another former Walmart worker, Dominic Ware, now working with OUR Walmart, who told the crowd the workers inside the store "want to come out and do what we're doing today. But they get intimidated daily. We're here to tell Walmart to stop, to respect their workers." The company has been on the defensive already well ahead of the Black Friday protests. Last week Walmart announced that Doug McMillon would replace Mike Duke as CEO. Business analysts say it will be the new CEO's task to raise wages paid to workers.



Marilyn Bechtel writes for Peoplesworld.org.

Health Care for the Holidays

By PW Editorial Board

There are many actions underway to win workers rights and push Congress on people's needs. Among them is the Health Care for the Holidays campaign launched by barackobama.com to educate and engage millions of people across the country with the Affordable Care Act. The stories of people getting health care relief through the new system are being buried in the media by negative stories. But what else can one expect from the corporate media?

The special website and education campaign has been launched to enable ordinary people to discuss the value of signing up for the Affordable Care Act with their families over the holidays. This is of direct benefit to family members and also an answer to the tea party attempt to block any progress for working people.

The tea party burst onto the national scene in 2009 during the summer recess when members of Congress held town hall meetings about

health care. The tea party's stated purpose was to disrupt and prevent any new health care legislation from passing. Since that time they have used every legislative and legal means at their disposal to destroy any pro-people health care reform. This has affected many other issues including the government shutdown. It will be a factor in the 2014 elections.

Many organizations are participating with the Health Care for the Holidays campaign including Organizing for Action and Working America.

Because of this good signs have been appearing. More people signed up in two days last week than during entire month of October.

You can make a difference in this effort.

Make your holiday more meaningful. Enjoy family, protest with Walmart workers, and take the time to learn about, discuss and sign up for the Affordable Care Act and your state health care program. It's a matter of life and health.

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In Detroit revenue, not spending, is the problem

By John Rummel



Bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes ruled today that Detroit, once home to almost two million people and responsible for producing one half of the world's cars, was insolvent and unable to provide basic services, making it the largest municipality in the country eligible for a Chapter 9 bankruptcy filing. He made that ruling even while saying the city did not bargain in good faith with its creditors.

His ruling will cause concern for the 23,500 retired city workers collecting pension benefits. Though their pensions are protected by the Michigan state constitution, Rhodes ruled they are not protected in a federal bankruptcy court.

However, Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr should feel some restraint. While Rhodes ruled pensions can be cut he also indicated he will not approve a plan with steep cuts and won't approve pension cuts unless the entire plan is "fair and equitable."

Of course what is fair and equitable for the average pensioner making less than \$19,000 a year and what is fair for Wall St Banks are two separate things.

Michigan Council 25 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the city's largest employee union, filed an immediate appeal on the ruling to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. The union also plans to ask Rhodes to allow the case to be sent directly to the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals to expedite the case.

Regarding the controversial idea of selling city assets including works of art from the world renowned Detroit Institute of Art, and the city's water and sewage utility, Rhodes noted the sales of city assets would not address the long-term issues of the city. One-time infusions of cash won't fix things, he said.

A regular cash flow is what the city needs. A report released three weeks ago by Demos, an economic research and policy center caused quite a stir when it concurred and said revenue, not spending, is the city's number one problem. It pointed out that contrary to popular opinion, city spending has declined over the last five years but its expenses have increased.

Further, the report noted, an exodus of jobs and loss of tax base devastated Detroit. The number of employed Detroit residents "fell by 53 percent from 2000 through 2012."

On top of that crisis was another: the city was particularly hard hit by the foreclosure crisis.

AFSCME District Council 25 President Al Garret recently hammered on another problem: hundreds of millions in state aid were withdrawn over last decade. The city only gets about half as much revenue as it did 10 years ago.

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LOCAL NEWS

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McDonald's workers fed up

By April Smith

The movement to raise the minimum wage for fast food workers got a boost here Thursday, beginning at 6:00 a.m. at a McDonald's, followed by a breakfast and rally with several hundred "D-15" workers, as the movement locally is called.

On the heels of Black Friday Walmart demonstrations last week, the Service Employees union and Good Jobs Now had called for today's events to support fast food workers in the Detroit area. It was part of a nationwide day of protests and strikes by fast food workers.

After welcoming all to the breakfast and thanking people for a "job well done," Rev. William Rideout said low-wage workers had to take a stand against corporate greed. Mark Schauer, Democratic candidate for Michigan governor, said a raise in minimum wage is long overdue. He noted that since 1968 the purchasing power of the minimum wage has dropped 20% while CEO pay has risen 700 percent in the same period.

Workers "can no longer take what they're dishing out," Michigan SEIU President Marge Robinson said. They can't make it on \$7.40 an hour, can't buy shoes for the kids, put food on the table, or pay the rent, Robinson said. It was time to "hit the picket lines," she said.

That's exactly what happened when the several hundred converged on a McDonald's on the city's west side.

50 delegaciones extranjeras en funeral de Mandela

Por Presna Latina

Las ceremonias fúnebres del expresidente Nelson Mandela son de una magnitud sin precedentes, indicaron fuentes del gobierno sudafricano, que esperan la visita esta semana de medio centenar de delegaciones extranjeras.

Con la atención del mundo en Sudáfrica, el gobierno tiene que garantizar el buen funcionamiento de eventos en los que miles de personas, dignatarios extranjeros y medios de comunicación estarán presentes, subrayó un comunicado estatal.

Las principales jornadas ceremoniales son el funeral de Estado en Qunu, tres días de exhibición pública de los restos de Madiba en Pretoria, y un acto homenaje masivo en el Estadio FNB de Johannesburgo, mañana martes.

Se calcula que unos dos mil 500 periodistas locales y extranjeros buscarán acreditación para cubrir las diversas actividades. El ministro de la Presidencia, Collins Chabane, explicó que debido al gran volumen de actos y programas se convocaron brigadas adicionales del Servicio de la Policía de Sudáfrica, de la Fuerza de Defensa Nacional y de la Policía Metropolitana para supervisar el orden público.

Chabane aseguró que el gobierno liderado por el presidente Jacob Zuma se mantiene en estrecho contacto con la viuda e hijas de Mandela para garantizar que todos los eventos se ajusten a los deseos de la familia y sean culturalmente aceptables, dijo.

El Ministro aclaró que no podía estimar cuántas personas asistirían

a la ceremonia conmemorativa en el estadio FNB, pero dijo que esa instalación solo puede albergar a unos 70 mil individuos.

Un total de 53 jefes de Estado han confirmado su asistencia a la monumental despedida oficial de Nelson Mandela, dijo el domingo la ministra de Relaciones Internacionales, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane. El hecho de que tantos líderes estatales estén dispuestos a viajar hasta Sudáfrica en un plazo tan corto de tiempo refleja que Madiba ocupa un lugar especial en los corazones de muchas personas en el mundo, dijo la funcionaria. Un Día Nacional de Oración y Reflexión enlazó la víspera a todos los sudafricanos, y a miles de ciudadanos extranjeros en este país, en recordación del legendario líder antirracista Nelson Mandela, fallecido la semana anterior.

La jornada dominical fue dedicada a asistir a iglesias, templos o sinagogas para celebrar la vida de Madiba y, a través de él, la de los demás sudafricanos que sacrificaron mucho por la dignidad de la nación austral, explicaron ciudadanos.

El presidente Jacob Zuma, miembros del ejecutivo y altos representantes del CNA participaron en un servicio religioso en evocación a Nelson Mandela en la Iglesia Metodista Bryanston, de Johannesburgo.

Distintas confesiones religiosas y diversas formaciones cívicas de la sociedad facilitaron la realización de actividades de reflexión y espiritualidad durante este período de luto en las nueve provincias de Sudáfrica.

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