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Chicago protestors: Cut the Pentagon, not our health

By John Bachtell



These cuts to Medicaid will affect home services that I depend upon, said Susan Aarup from her wheelchair. “I shouldn’t have to choose between paying for food and electricity.”

Aarup, a member of the disability rights group Disabled Americans Want Work Now (DAWNN), was speaking in Federal Plaza at a rally of seniors, disabled and veterans on Valentine’s Day. They had gathered to demand Congress stop the across the board cuts to people’s programs scheduled to go into effect March 1.

“Don’t break our hearts. Stop in the name of love. We can’t have cuts to programs we depend upon,” declared Mary Zerkel Peace Building Program coordinator of the American Friends Service Committee.

As part of the action, thousands of postcards were delivered to U.S. Senators Mark Kirk, R. and Richard Durbin, D., demanding no cuts.

The protestors wanted to remind the senators how the cuts, known as sequestration, would devastate the lives of real people and their communities, who are already reeling under federal budget cuts made over the past two years.

In addition to impacting people like Aarup, nearly 4,000 children in Illinois will be cut from Head Start and another 3,348 fewer children will

receive services under the Child Care and Development Block Grants.

Deep cuts would mean thousands of state residents will lose Low Income Energy Assistance, Adult Job Training grants, Community Services block grants and other programs that effect every sector of the population. Zerkel pointed out the cuts would also mean the loss of thousands of jobs in Illinois including over 800 Head Start workers, and over 1000 other jobs in education at a time

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of high unemployment and economic stagnation.

Planned cuts of Federal aid to the states for Medicaid would heavily impact the program. A 5 percent cut would reduce Illinois’s Medicaid budget by nearly \$500 million. Another \$1.1 billion in business activity would be lost along with over

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9,000 jobs.

Stretched out next to Zerkel was a long banner dramatically illustrating the federal discretionary budget. Sixty percent of the banner was colored in red, representing funding for the military. Funding for education, health care and other programs vital to people and communities took up the rest.

"All the programs we need get very little money," said Zerkel. "The Pentagon budget is where we should be cutting. U.S. military spending has doubled since 2001."

The base Pentagon budget has grown from \$287 billion to \$530 billion, without accounting for the extra costs associated with the Iraq and Afghanistan operations.

Zerkel said the Pentagon didn't even spend the money it was allocated last year. Over \$100 billion went unspent in 2012.

"Could that money go to making sure 140 Chicago public schools don't close this year?" asked Zerkel, referring to anticipated closures to be announced next month.

Kristina Tendilla sees the consequences of the economic crisis and budget cuts in her community

on a daily basis. Tendilla is an outreach worker at Benton House, a 100 year-old settlement house in the Bridgeport neighborhood.

"These cuts would devastate our community. I am not prepared to turn away any of the 1600 families we have served over the past two years," said Tendilla. "The Benton House food bank has grown exponentially." The dots between military spending and the economic crisis needs to be connected said Vince Emanuele, a US Marine veteran who served in Iraq.

"The one elephant in the room is military spending," said Emanuele. "Connections must be made between the \$53 billion Illinois deficit and the \$63 billion the state's taxpayers have sent to the Pentagon since 2001."

Emanuele asked if the federal government loves veterans so much, why are there tens of thousands living on the street?

"We need to talk about the military spending and its impact on health care, education and jobs," he said.



John Bachtell is Illinois Bureau chief

Obama and the struggle for reforms

By PW Editorial Board

President Obama's State of the Union speech reveals once again that president is a democratic reformer (on domestic issues) in the mold of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson.

And the fact that the president has a disposition toward reform is of great significance - not only to the millions who are struggling to mitigate the worst effects of 30 years of right-wing extremism and capitalist globalization, but also to people who desire social change of a radical nature.

The reforming impulse of Roosevelt and Johnson - shaped by many factors, including but not exclusively by the mass movements of their era - helped to create a terrain on which millions could intervene and expand the boundaries of freedom. Similarly, Obama's reforming inclinations open up space for the broader movement to fight and win victories today.

Of course, this president, just as Roosevelt and Johnson did, will surely attempt to limit the sweep and depth of the reform process. But to

turn that into a rationale not to join him on issues of mutual concern such as jobs, immigration, climate change, gun violence, taxing the rich, cutting the military budget and nuclear stockpile and so on, is a recipe for the left's political marginalization.

The outcome of these struggles will depend on two things. One is the relative strength of the opposing sides. But the other is the ability of the organized people's movement to put its political imprint on the reform process within the broader coalition that they are a part, while at the same time, (and this is where politics becomes an art) maintaining the coalition's broad unity against the main obstacles to social progress - again the Republican right and its corporate supporters.

Coalition politics and reform struggles are anything but pure; they are, by nature, a polyglot; an uneasy amalgamation of disparate forces. Still they are the ground - and the only ground - out of which change, including radical and socialist change, will come.

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Valentine's Day protest demands halt to sexual harassment

By Marilyn Bechtel

No chocolates were to be seen, but flowers were everywhere as over 70 women and men - union, community, immigrant rights, and faith group members - gathered on Valentine's Day in front of Mi Pueblo Foods, in the heart of Oakland's heavily Latino Fruitvale district.

There, they prepared to join former Mi Pueblo worker Laura Robledo in attempting to deliver a Valentine's Day letter to the store's owner.

In her letter to Mi Pueblo owner Juvenal Chavez, Robledo told how, after she asked the company to investigate unwelcome sexual advances by a fellow employee, she was first suspended and then fired over alleged misconduct.

While Chavez boasts of being a benefactor to the community, and claims Mi Pueblo is a safe and dignifying place to work, wrote Robledo, "the reality is that we are under a lot of pressure to make sure your company achieves its weekly and yearly sales goals. As a result, we suffer accidents and stress levels skyrocket."

Robledo urged Chavez to meet with her and with community leaders about employees' working conditions, and to sign the Justice for Mercado Workers' code of conduct launched by the United Food and Commercial Workers, Teamsters, and faith and community leaders to protect the rights



participating in the government's E-Verify program to determine the status of immigrant workers, and to call on Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to halt "the ongoing silent raid at your stores."

After a brief rally, Robledo led the crowd of UFCW members, workers organizing at Walmart, and community members to the store's entrance, where a phalanx of security guards barred their entry. Depositing flowers at the door as crowds of customers looked on, the demonstrators vowed to continue a boycott of the chain launched last fall.

Mi Pueblo Foods employs some 3,200 workers at 21 stores in northern California. Workers there are seeking to join the UFCW, and are protesting the chain's participation in E-Verify, in an effort to thwart organizing efforts. Workers also charge the chain with speed-up, discrimination against women workers, and failure to hire black workers.

Demonstrators vowed to continue a boycott of the chain launched last fall.

LOCAL NEWS

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Right to work for less dies in New Hampshire

By John Wojcik

The New Hampshire House of Representatives gave a resounding defeat to the union haters this week when it voted 212-141 against a right to work for less bill.

Before the vote firemen packed into the gallery with members and leaders of other unions. Loud and continuous applause broke out when the bill went down to defeat. "I want to congratulate New Hampshire lawmakers today for listening to the people and defending the rights of all the state's employees," said Harold Schaitberger, the Firefighters' president.

"These so called 'right-to-work' bills are cropping up all over the country, but the name hides the truth, because they are really moves to take away the rights of the workers, not protect them."

Right to work for less bills have been pushed in state legislative bodies by the shady and rich American Legislative Exchange Council, which has worked in overdrive to shift the politics of the nation to the right. Bills introduced in at least a dozen states are copies of templates designed by ALEC.

MacKenzie said the timing of the victory in New Hampshire "couldn't be better because it is reminding people at a critical time that their economic progress and their rights are at stake. The laws are not right for New Hampshire and they are not right for America."

Vicepresidente Ejecutivo de Venezuela pidió respeto para Chávez

Por Presna Latina

Vicepresidente Ejecutivo de Venezuela pidió respeto para Chávez. El Vicepresidente Ejecutivo de Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, pidió 18 feb respeto para el jefe de Estado, Hugo Chávez, quien se encuentra en el Hospital Militar de esta capital tras regresar al país.

Maduro salió este lunes al paso de pronunciamientos de la oposición sobre el mandatario y comentó que para la derecha es mejor el silencio respetuoso frente a las declaraciones irónicas que están dando.

Lo que hemos hecho, dijo, es responder una por una las maldades de una derecha nacional e internacional que no se cansa de hacerle daño al país. No pudieron lograr sus objetivos en 70 días (de ausencia de Chávez de Venezuela) y no podrán hacerlo en 70 siglos, afirmó.

Unido a ello, pidió se eviten afectaciones a la vida normal del hospital donde se atienden miles de personas y entre las cuales el presidente es un paciente más.

Socialistas venezolanos llaman a apoyar recuperación de Chávez

El Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) llamó 18 feb a respetar el entorno del Hospital Militar de esta capital, con vistas a apoyar la recuperación del presidente Hugo Chávez tras su regreso al país.

El mandatario retornó de La Habana, Cuba, en la madrugada de este lunes y se encuentra en ese centro asistencial, según anunció en su cuenta de la red social Twitter.

El directivo del PSUV Aristóbulo Istúriz recordó que en esa institución también se atienden otras personas y se impone garantizar su normal func-

ionamiento.

Unido a ello, Asturiz expresó el apoyo a las decisiones económicas adoptadas recientemente por el gobierno, con vistas a defender las conquistas del pueblo.

Asimismo, hizo un llamado a los venezolanos a no dejarse manipular por representantes de la oposición, quienes quieren hacer ver las medidas económicas adoptadas por el Gobierno como un paquetazo.

Respecto al proceso de primarias en la organización de cara a los comicios municipales, indicó que la dirección política de cada estado va a dirigir ese paso, con vistas a lograr una candidatura que cuente con la mayor aceptación.

Brasil renueva votos por recuperación de presidente venezolano

El canciller brasileño, Antonio Patriota, deseo la plena recuperación de la salud del presidente Hugo Chávez.

"Hacemos votos por la plena recuperación del presidente Chávez", resaltó Patriota en rueda de prensa en la cancellería.

Tras manifestar satisfacción por el retorno del gobernante a Caracas, la capital de Venezuela, rememoró que hace unos 10 días visitó esa nación, donde se entrevistó con su homólogo Elías Jaua.

Se trató de un encuentro productivo, donde analizamos la marcha de las excelentes relaciones bilaterales y pasos a seguir por esa nación como miembro pleno del Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur).

El titular señaló que el ministro venezolano de Relaciones Exteriores visitará próximamente Brasilia.

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