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Iran sanctions eased, exiles urge more progress on democratic rights

by C. J. Atkins



News of a prisoner swap between the United States and Iran last Saturday was followed up just a few hours later by the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) announcement that Iran was now fully in compliance with the inspection regime concerning its nuclear energy program. The IAEA confirmation signalled the easing of most of the international sanctions that have been in place against the country since 2006.

Though restrictions banning U.S. businesses from trading with Iran remain in place, the removal of nuclear-related sanctions represents the fruition of President Obama's 2008 pledge to restart diplomatic engagement between the two countries. The negotiations leading to Saturday's announcement included Iran, Germany, and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, but the U.S.-Iran rapprochement has been widely seen as the primary reason for their success.

The deal, hailed by peace activists when it was concluded last year, has been seen as a possible foundation for a new approach to U.S. foreign policy premised on diplomacy rather than armed force and threats. Its potential to speed up cooperation on dealing with ISIS and the threat of reactionary extremists in the region has also

been highlighted. Several members of Congress, most of the GOP presidential candidates, as well as hardliners in the Iranian parliament and the government of Israel, have all attacked the move toward normalization.

Progressives in the Iranian exile community, meanwhile, have praised the lifting of sanctions, but are also warning against international complacency in the face of continued repression of domestic democratic forces by the Iranian

T H I S W E E K :

- Sanctions eased, exiles urge more progress on rights
- Workers tell Los Angeles: Stop job discrimination!
- Boston's MLK march unites movements for justice
- Cuba celebra el Día Mundial de los Humedales
- CPUSA responds to Obama's State of the Union

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government.

If the Iranian government is willing to negotiate the release of foreign citizens held prisoner, CODIR says that it should do the same for domestic political prisoners including trade unionists, women's rights campaigners, and

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leaders of the “Green Movement.” The Green Movement brought thousands together in protest against the alleged electoral fraud that returned President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to office in 2009.

CODIR also raised concerns that the new economic opportunities opened by the easing of international tensions will not be widely shared among the Iranian people. It cited widespread corruption in the system and noted that the new funds gained from selling oil and gas on the international market will likely accrue mostly to the Iranian elite.

In its own statement, the left-wing Tudeh Party of Iran also brought attention to the government’s economic failings as one reason for its willingness to negotiate with international powers. “The regime’s factions collectively supported the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [i.e. the deal] because the more than eight years of damaging policies of Ahmadinejad...and the devastating sanctions of imperialist states created immense problems for our country.” The party said that inflation, bankruptcy of many

manufacturing firms, high unemployment, and skyrocketing poverty all raised the danger of social implosion and forced the regime to the bargaining table.

Back in the U.S., defending the nuclear agreement and demanding that it be expanded is now the task of the peace and international solidarity movements. The forces opposed to international cooperation in both of the major parties, as well as the military-industrial complex will be actively moving to sabotage the progress made so far. For them, power and profits are at stake. The success achieved so far in the U.S.-Iran negotiations provides powerful evidence, however, that diplomacy can work.



C. J. Atkins is the opinion editor at Peoplesworld.

Workers tell Los Angeles: Stop job discrimination!

By Rossana Cambron

Los Angeles Black workers and anti wage theft activists have joined forces to demand that the city take action on Black workers’ economic plight.

Black, Brown, Asian and white workers marched through the streets of Los Angeles demanding that local enforcement of federal equal opportunity guidelines be added to the range of responsibilities of the wage enforcement division that was established in 2015.

The Los Angeles Black Workers Center and the Los Angeles Coalition Against Wage Theft organized a march, ending in the chambers of the city council demanding concrete action to address the fact that roughly 50 percent of L.A.’s Black workers are under- or unemployed.

Loretta Stevens, co-director of the L.A. Black Worker Center, said that Seattle and Portland have launched initiatives to address these issues. “Why can’t Los Angeles?”

As the city grows, such equity in hiring and other workplace practices is by no means assured.

As you walk through the downtown area of L.A., you see many new buildings being constructed. Yet a 2015 survey of several construction work-sites conducted by Los Angeles Black Workers Center found that black workers were underrepresented, not only on construction sites overall, but also at sites within or adjacent to majority-black areas.

The groups are calling for the City of L.A. to create a local Discrimination Compliant Resolution System within the Human Relations Commissions. They are also calling for the city to create a civil rights ordinance that will empower the city to work with federal and state agencies to strengthen enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.

During public comment, workers representing different racial backgrounds addressed the city council in support of Black workers and called for an end to job discrimination.

One worker stated that as she marched by several construction jobs going on in the city, she only saw one Black construction worker.

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Boston's MLK march unites movements for economic and racial justice

By Nick Giannone



Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. stood with Memphis sanitation workers shortly before his assassination--now, advocates in Boston are invoking his legacy to continue the fight for economic and racial justice.

Hundreds attended a Jan. 18 march organized by Mass Action Against Police Brutality (MAAPB) and the Fight for \$15 Massachusetts campaign demanding: the jailing of police officers who commit violence; a \$15/hour wage and union representation for workers; a rejection of Islamophobia; and an end to institutional racism.

The march started in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood and proceeded from there to Grove Hall with several stops along the way.

The months following the 2014 civil uprisings in Ferguson, MO have brought to light numerous cases of police violence, such as the high-profile cases of victims Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice and Laquan McDonald.

In Boston, former MBTA officer Jennifer Amyot Garvey was recently indicted for assaulting Roxbury resident Mary Holmes, who intervened publicly in another case of police abuse. Other cases of police violence, such as those of Burrell Ramsey, White, Denis Reynoso and Usaama Rahim, have never seen indictment or sentencing. MAAPB is calling for the

state to prosecute police officers complicit in these acts of violence.

The march also highlighted active labor struggles in Boston involving fast food workers, adjunct professors and airport baggage handlers fighting for fair wages and union representation.

Marchers stopped at fast food restaurants along the route and were joined by a contingent of airport workers. The airport workers had staged a separate action earlier in the day where six people were arrested.

"The fight against police brutality is central to the fight against racial and economic injustice," said Brock Satter of Mass Action Against Police Brutality.

"As we commemorate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the fight for economic and racial justice continues," said Darius Cephas, Boston McDonald's worker and National Organizing Committee member with the Fight for \$15.

"The intersection of racial and economic justice is evident in the fast food industry, where people of color make up more than 43 percent of employees. The Fight for \$15 is to restore dignity in the workplace and create a community where we can all walk safely without fear of losing our life to the police."

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LOCAL NEWS

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How the Oscars began as a tool for union-avoidance

Northwest Labor Press

Everyone's heard of the Academy Awards, but few know the anti-union origins of its sponsor, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

The Academy was founded in 1927 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio boss Louis Mayer to prevent unionization in the film industry.

As an invitation-only professional organization, it was meant to be a more prestigious alternative to unionization. With separate branches for producers, actors, writers, directors, and technicians, it would settle workplace disputes and eliminate the need for unions and strikes - while remaining controlled by producers.

From 1927 to 1933, the Academy functioned as a company union. In competition with the Screen Actors Guild and other unions, it developed a standard contract covering terms and conditions of work.

Hollywood unionized anyway in 1933, and company-controlled unions were outlawed in 1935. But the Academy continues on as a way to promote the film industry. To this day, its membership is self-selecting, and secret.

The Screen Actors Guild film and TV awards are chosen by union members, and honor the collective.

Cuba celebra el Día Mundial de los Humedales

Susana Aguilar Mújica

Este año, con el tema "Humedales para nuestro futuro", estará dedicado a los Medios de vida sostenibles, para demostrar el papel crucial de los humedales en el bienestar actual y futuro de la humanidad y para promover su uso racional.

El Día Mundial de los Humedales se celebra cada 2 de febrero en el mundo, para crear conciencia acerca del valor de esos ecosistemas para la humanidad y el planeta.

Ese día se conmemora la fecha en que se adoptó la Convención sobre los Humedales (Ramsar) en 1971. Este año, con el tema "Humedales para nuestro futuro", estará dedicado a los Medios de vida sostenibles, para demostrar el papel crucial de los humedales en el bienestar actual y futuro de la humanidad y para promover su uso racional.

Todos dependemos de los humedales para obtener agua dulce para nuestras necesidades diarias, pero más de mil millones de personas en todo el mundo dependen directamente de ellos en actividades tales como la pesca, el cultivo de arroz, la construcción, la elaboración de tejidos, la medicina, el transporte, el turismo, etc. Para esas personas, los humedales saludables son esenciales para su sustento y fundamentales para su bienestar.

Sin embargo, los humedales costeros, marinos y continentales están disminuyendo rápidamente. Según la tendencia en poco más de 40 años se ha degradado aproximadamente el 40 % de ellos y esta disminución continúa a un ritmo acelerado del 1,5 % anual.

Cuba es parte de la Convención Ramsar desde el año 2001. Presenta seis sitios Ramsar y 30 % de las Áreas protegidas cubanas son humedales. Los sitios Ramsar cubanos son la Ciénaga de Zapata, en Matanzas; el Humedal Delta del Cauto, en Granma; el Gran Humedal del Norte, de Ciego de Ávila; el Humedal Río Máximo-Camagüey, en la provincia de Camagüey, y Ciénaga de Lanier y sur de la Isla de la Juventud.

En estos momentos nos encontramos trabajando en dos nuevas propuestas de sitio Ramsar cubanos: el Humedal Guanahacabibes y el Humedal Sur de los Palacios, ambas en la provincia de Pinar del Río. Además, se ha trabajado en el inventario de la lista de humedales cubanos, la aprobación legal de los sitios Ramsar, y el manejo adecuado de estos sitios para su conservación.

Cada año, el 2 de febrero se celebra en nuestros humedales este día, con diversas actividades como talleres de intercambio científico, festivales de intercambio científico, festivales de participación comunitaria, concursos de dibujo, poesía, fotografía, actividades culturales, acciones de los círculos de interés en las escuelas cercanas a los humedales y muchísimas otras actividades que incrementan el conocimiento y sensibilización de las personas por el cuidado de estos importantes ecosistemas.

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