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AFL-CIO calls for universal voter registration

By John Wojcik

The labor movement has added its voice to the demands for voting reform that are sweeping the nation. Today, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka called for adoption of a universal and automatic voter registration system that will ensure everyone can be part of the democratic process.

Trumka made the call in a speech Dec. 14 to the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation. "A strong and growing grassroots democracy movement needs to come together to push back against the next wave of state-level attacks on the right to vote," Trumka declared.

Concern has mounted as, across the country in the last several years, the GOP has worked to suppress the vote in a variety of ways including restrictions on voter registration; voter photo ID schemes that make it harder to vote for students, minorities and seniors; curtailing early voting and unjustified purges of voter registration lists.

Only two days earlier, at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Attorney General Eric Holder declared, "It is important for national leaders, academic experts, and members of the public to engage in a frank, thorough, and inclusive discussion about how our election systems can be made stronger and more accessible."

The attorney general put forward several ideas including automatic registration that moves with the voter, longer operating hours for polling locations, and more days to vote. Holder's proposals



have been backed by major voting rights organizations, including the Brennan Center for Justice.

The attorney general's move appears to signal that President Obama was serious about election reform when he mentioned it in his victory speech in the early hours of Nov. 7.

The president said he wanted to thank "every American who participated in this election. Whether you voted for the very first time, or waited in line for a very long time - by the way we have to fix that."

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ties they gained in state level governments in 2010 to curb democracy in a number of ways that go beyond just restricting who can vote. They have

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used the opportunity provided by the post Census redistricting to redraw congressional district lines, for example, in ways that corral voters who tend to vote Democratic together in several districts and spread those who vote Republican into a larger number of districts,

The GOP has already used what many say is this undemocratic power grab to strip the people of Michigan of their union rights and are moving ahead in this lame-duck session to pass bills ending abortion rights and even a bill banning "sharia law" in the state.

Republicans are using their ill-gotten majorities in some swing states to make the Electoral College be determined by their gerrymandered congressional districts rather than through the popular vote, giving them the same advantage in presidential elections that they have already secured in state and congressional elections.

The labor movement sees the fight for voting reform as a fight that is closely tied to the struggle for economic justice in the country.

On the issue of automatic voter registration, Trumka said, "It is the norm for most of the

world's democracies and can be a major weapon to counter the attacks and the corporate cash let loose by Citizens United."

"We need to fundamentally change access to the ballot," he said. "Only about two of three black and white voters are registered, but half - half - of eligible Latinos and Asians are not registered to vote today, and that's unacceptable. We're going to do something about it."

He said the AFL-CIO and a variety of groups are working together to develop a strategy to achieve universal and automatic registration.

Holder, in his talk at the Kennedy Library, a place dedicated to a president who is seen as having helped set in motion some of the important voting rights legislation at stake today, declared, "This nation has come too far, and its people - from all races, religions, creeds, backgrounds, and walks of life - have sacrificed too much not to finish the task of ensuring equal voting rights for all Americans."



John Wojcik is People's World labor editor.

Job growth key to avoiding budget deficits

PW Editorial

The media is absorbed now with trying to decide how close President Obama and House Republicans are to a deal that would avoid the "fiscal cliff."

With the president building popular support for higher taxes on the rich and for economic stimulus by campaigning at rallies around the country, with the labor movement and its allies demanding jobs programs and no cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, or Social Security.

With polls showing all voters, even Republicans, opposed to the positions taken by House and Senate Republicans, it is no surprise that the GOP is cracking.

Missing from the current fight in Washington over "spending cuts" and deficit reduction, however, is adequate discussion of the course of action that would most decisively solve the federal fiscal dilemma.

The deficit will only go away, long term, to the extent that we grow our economy.

Money brought in from the tax breaks should be combined not with budget cuts but with a massive job-creating stimulus program if we are serious about solving the long-term budget deficit.

EPI estimates, for example, that just half of the money brought in by ending the tax breaks on

the rich would add two million jobs next year and reduce the ten-year budget deficit by \$651 billion - quite a big chunk of the \$4 trillion in red ink over the next ten years that the president and congressional lawmakers are bargaining about.

EPI says that, included in the budget deficit-busting stimulus, should be an extension of emergency federal jobless benefits.

Just the one step of giving \$120 billion to states in direct fiscal aid from 2013 to 2015, by means of increased federal Medicaid funds and block grants, would boost real GDP growth by 0.4 percent and add a half-million jobs.

The same EPI report demonstrates clearly what would happen in a "compromise" scenario that involved letting the tax cuts for the rich expire, on the one hand, and by cutting government spending by half a trillion, forgetting about extension of jobless benefits, and extending the payroll tax cuts, on the other.

The budget deficit would decline ever so slightly, but the real deficit - the jobs deficit - would go up as 1.36 million more people would lose their jobs due to the spending cuts.

The nation would enter a new round of recession.

None of that is the way to fix an economy.

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Fiscal cliff or soaring inequality: Which is scarier?

By Sam Webb

In the early aftermath of World War II, the Truman administration was hell bent on reversing U.S. foreign policy from wartime cooperation to unrestrained hostility towards the Soviet Union. To win public acceptance for this policy U-turn, Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan advised the president “to scare the pants off the American people.”

Which is exactly what Truman (and the entire establishment) did. They let loose the dogs of anti-Soviet, anti-communist hysteria on the American people. And by and large, they were successful. Anti-Soviet and anti-communist ideas came to dominate people’s thinking, crowding out, if not destroying, the democratic, progressive, and internationalist outlook of the New Deal and World War II years.

We know what followed - a permanent war economy and society, a spiraling arms race hanging like a sword over humanity’s head, successive and costly military interventions in far flung lands, the rise of the national security state.

But what does this have to do with today? More than you think.

The U.S. ruling class, stealing a page from Truman’s playbook, is trying again to “scare the pants off the American people.”

But the object of fear in this case isn’t the Soviet Union, which unfortunately no longer exists. It’s the “fiscal cliff” and the supposed economic abyss that lies beyond it.

But guess what? So far the American people are not running scared. In the November elections and in recent public opinion polls their desire is clear - to go forward, not backward. No evidence exists to suggest that they are ready either now or in the future to destroy Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, or roll back domestic spending, or resolve the budget crisis on the people’s backs.

In short, they are not ready to become accessories to their own undoing.

But here is where it gets complicated. Not all of the political class in the nation’s capital shares this point of view.

But what might surprise you is that some Democrats are buckling in the face of the so-



called “fiscal cliff.” Contrary to the wishes of voters who elected them, they are seemingly open to reductions in earned income benefit programs in exchange for winning an increase in marginal tax rates on the top layers of the capitalist class.

This position, while far less extreme than the Republican/tea-party right, is a problem. It goes in the wrong direction. It’s unnecessary. And it countermands the election mandate.

There are other steps that would really ensure the long-term sustainability of the earned-income programs - Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid - and at the same time help curb the deficit. They include: cutting the military budget, raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations to levels that existed in the 1960s, raising the income cap on Social Security deductions, implementing single-payer health care and, short of that, making the federal government the sole buyer of prescription drugs.

This is what should be on Congress’s legislative agenda - not more cutbacks in living standards.

For more than 30 years, the earned incomes and job opportunities of working people have been tracking downward, while the unearned income and profit-making opportunities of the wealthiest corporations and families have been tracking upward, and both at historically unprecedented rates.

That’s what’s really scary. And that more than anything else is what needs to change.

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Human Rights Day demand: tax rich

By Marilyn Bechtel

She stood silhouetted against the backdrop of a holiday-lit City Hall. But she wasn't speaking of holiday celebrations.

"We are standing in solidarity today with millions of Americans across this country demanding basic economic fairness," AF-SCME spokesperson Brenda Wood told the crowd in front of her. "We are fighting for our jobs and our communities and we won't back down."

The crowd responded, "We won't back down!"

Wood was addressing hundreds of protesters gathered in Civic Center Plaza in San Francisco, to insist that the rich must pay their fair share and that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid be strengthened, not cut, in any moves to cope with the deficit.

The gathering, on Dec. 10 - International Human Rights Day - was among over 100 such actions around the country, organized by the AFL-CIO, MoveOn and others.

In Oakland, U.S. Representative Barbara Lee said as she stood at the Social Security office door: "Here we are in the wealthiest country in the world, talking about going off a fiscal cliff. I call it a human cliff. These are proposals that have been created in attempts to balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable: our poor, our senior citizens, low-income individuals, our children, working men and women, our disabled." But in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn., the home concert halls of Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra will be dark. The world-class musicians of both highly honored orchestras have been locked out since October. The management of both orchestras is demanding massive pay cuts-as much as 50%-and other harmful new provisions.

Similar actions were taking place across the U.S.

Republicanos quieren posponer discusiones sobre deuda EE.UU.

By Prensa Latina

El líder republicano John Boehner propuso al presidente Barack Obama posponer por un año las discusiones sobre el techo de la deuda, para que el Congreso estadounidense se pueda concentrar en el llamado abismo fiscal.

Igualmente el titular de la Cámara de Representantes sugirió a la Casa Blanca subir los impuestos para aquellos ciudadanos que ganan más de un millón de dólares anuales.

Obama ha reiterado que no piensa ceder terreno en sus planes de aumentar las tasas para ingresos superiores a 250 mil dólares anuales, y que el Congreso está obligado a solucionar el tema de los 16,4 billones de dólares en el déficit nacional.

De hecho el mandatario demócrata rechazó ambos planteamientos republicanos con el argumento de que no contemplaban nuevos beneficios para el mercado laboral para contrarrestar el alto desempleo, cercano al ocho por ciento.

Cuando faltan dos semanas para el vencimiento del plazo camino a soluciones políticas, demócratas y republicanos (sobre todo en la Cámara baja) continúan enfrascados en discusiones interminables acerca del inminente abismo fiscal, que significaría un alza masiva de impuestos.

Si el Capitolio falla en alcanzar un pacto acerca del tema de la crisis fiscal antes del 31 de diciembre, corre el riesgo de caer al mismo tiempo en otra compleja negociación sobre finanzas federales: el techo de la deuda.

Antes de enero de 2013, los legisladores deben resolver el dilema que se avecina por un alza masiva

de impuestos y los recortes de gastos sociales, pero además en esa fecha vence un plazo relacionado con el déficit federal.

El problema del techo de la deuda, que ya inmovilizó al parlamento a mediados de 2011, amenaza con regresar y coincidir ahora con las enmarañadas discusiones para evitar el precipicio fiscal, comenta la analista Jeanne Said, en el medio digital CNNMoney.

En otras noticias, el gobernador del estado de Carolina del Sur, Nikki Haley, designó al congresista republicano Tim Scott como el nuevo senador federal por ese territorio, en sustitución de Jim DeMint, quien pasará a retiro.

Scott, de 47 años, es el único negro del partido rojo que es miembro de la Cámara de Representantes, el cuarto republicano de esa raza en la historia del Senado norteamericano y el primero desde que el entonces senador Barack Obama fuera electo presidente.

DeMint, uno de los favoritos del ultraconservador movimiento Tea Party, anunció recientemente que dejará el legislativo a partir del primero de enero de 2013 y será el nuevo presidente de la Heritage Foundation, un tanque pensante conservador con sede en esta capital.

Scott ha tenido una carrera política ascendente, pues en 2008 presidía el consejo del Condado de Charleston, en Carolina del Sur, ese año se convirtió en el primer republicano negro en la legislatura estadual en más de un siglo, y en 2012 obtuvo su actual asiento en la Cámara baja.