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People aren't buying what NATO is selling

By John Wojcik

As the 28-country North Atlantic Treaty Organization gathers this week in Chicago for its summit, Americans aren't buying much of what the alliance is trying to sell.

Right off the bat, the war in Afghanistan and U.S. military spending are two of the biggest items people are rejecting.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D., N.H., is a member of the U.S. delegation to the NATO summit, and she spoke with the press yesterday on a teleconference called by the National Security Network, a group which aims to "revitalize" America's security policy and bring "cohesion" and "strategic focus" to the "progressive" national security "community."

She said that the biggest priority at the summit this week would be finalization of plans for a "responsible" drawdown of NATO in Afghanistan by 2014.

The cost of funding the "drawdown" is expected to be announced at the summit.

However, Shaheen admitted, under questioning, that the U.S. taxpayers will be responsible for shelling out to Afghanistan most of the \$4.1 billion annual cost of that country's permanent 228,000-member force. (It's the Afghan force that takes over after NATO pulls out.)

That amount will continue to be paid until 2018, Shaheen said, and will probably go up, rather than down, in the years after 2018. Currently, there is no end date for bankrolling Afghanistan's army. Shaheen heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's subcommittee on Europe.



"The United States will be paying for this," Afghanistan's foreign minister Jawed Ludin assured journalists in Kabul last week. The U.S. embassy there declined comment on Ludin's assurances.

Pointing to the economic disaster brewing in Europe, Shaheen didn't hold out much hope that any of the alliance's member countries would be stepping forward to shoulder more NATO expenses themselves, particularly in Afghanistan..

The American people have already made it clear that they want nothing to do with any long-term military involvement in Afghanistan, and presumably less to do with funding such involve-

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ment. Seven out of 10 Americans (69 percent) believe the U.S. should not be at war in Afghanistan,

It's not just the street protesters and peace organizations that are lining up in opposition to NATO, however.

according to a recent New York Times poll. Opposition to the war cuts across ideological divides, with 68 percent of Democrats saying the war was going somewhat or very badly and 60 percent of Republicans agreeing.

It's not just the street protesters and peace organizations that are lining up in opposition to NATO, however. The very need for an alliance like NATO is being questioned in capitals around the globe. The alliance, critics note, was formed in 1949 to combat the so-called "Communist threat."

After the collapse of the socialist countries in 1990s, the alliance, rather than closing up shop, however, found new ways to keep itself in existence, first by mounting the biggest cluster bomb attacks in history in Kosovo, and later by fashioning itself as the world leader of the "war on terrorism" launched by George W. Bush.

The recent intervention in Libya, critics note, was an intensification of NATO's role too as champion of big oil interests.

NATO touted its Libya intervention as "different," calling it a "humanitarian" intervention

with no boots on the ground like in Iraq and no cluster bombs like in Yugoslavia. Only "precision" weapons were going to be used in Libya!

The UN and human rights groups say today that in Libya 8,000 prisoners are being held without trial, that there is routine torture and death in Libyan prisons and that 12,000 black Libyans from town of Tawerga has been forcibly removed.

According to Human Rights Watch, the "precision" bombs alone killed at least 72 Libyan civilians, at least a third of them children. The NATO-installed National Transitional Council estimated 30,000 dead from the "humanitarian" intervention, civilians and soldiers.

As the main funder of NATO, the United States however, is faced with a dilemma that comes down to guns vs. butter, jobs not bombs. Endless military interventions are a lose-lose for all involved.

The protests here this week aim to get across that message.



John Wojcik is PW Labor Editor.

Labor is on the move

By PW Editorial Board

For over 30 years the labor movement has faced relentless corporate, political, and right wing attack. Since the beginning of "the great recession" this attack on labor and labor rights has risen in intensity and viciousness.

The disastrous 2010 elections opened the floodgates for all-out corporate war on labor. Ultra right Republicans, organized and funded by shadowy think tanks, now nationally coordinate political and legislative efforts to destroy labor rights. "Right to work" for less laws and assault on collective bargaining rights for public workers, are front and center in a vicious Republican right-wing soup of racist attacks on immigrant workers, attacks on women's rights and women's health, and voter suppression laws aimed particularly at communities of color and the elderly. These billionaire and corporate funded anti-labor campaigns are at the heart of an overall right-wing attack on democracy.

As can be expected in this situation, the house of labor is responding in many different ways. There are so many tugs and pulls on labor. To mention just a few: How to respond to political attacks and anti-labor legislation? How to respond to outsourcing and new technology?

Much has changed in labor in the last 30 years.

Most visible in recent months has been the explosions of activity and fight back in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and several other states. In Wisconsin hundreds of thousands have hit the streets to recall Gov. Scott Walker and some of the Republican leadership in the Wisconsin Legislature. This is Wisconsin workers direct challenge to the attack on public workers in their state. Well over a million people signed the recall petitions largely organized by labor. In Ohio hundreds of thousands of trade unionists took to the streets all over the state to collect over a million signatures to overturn a Republican inspired law to take away collective bargaining rights for public workers. And in Indiana the labor movement mobilized throughout the state to try and defeat a right to work law.

In all of these situations not only was the labor leadership and membership mobilized, but significant support came from unorganized workers and local communities. Increasingly across the country the labor movement, small as it may be, is seen by unorganized as well as union workers as a bulwark against attacks on democracy.

Labor is on the move and in what promises to be a close election coming up that can be decisive!

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Immigrants protest harsh deportation policy

By Rick Nagin

Immigrant workers and their families from across northern Ohio rallied in Cleveland to protest rising deportations of parents of U.S. citizen children. Gathering in Willard Park across from the Federal Building close to 150 held signs and banners, chanted and heard speakers denounce the rising threat.

The action was sparked by a report given to Congress by John Morton, Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) March 26 revealing that over 46,000 parents of U.S. citizen children had been deported in the first six months of 2011.

"If that rate continued, it means close to 100,000 in one year," said Veronica Dahlberg, director of HOLA, an immigrant rights group based in Painesville. "That's the same number deported over the previous ten years."

The deportations are overwhelmingly ordinary workers - housekeepers, dishwashers, farm workers - she said.

HOLA and other groups are circulating a letter to the White House asking President Barack Obama to issue an executive order to stop non-criminal deportations.

She said part of the reason for the increased deportations is that ICE has been overfunded, with an annual budget of \$7.2 billion while the U.S. Marshalls Department, which focuses on criminals, receives only \$1 billion.

"This is a cowardly policy," said Baldemar Velasquez, President of the Toledo-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee. "ICE is picking on the most vulnerable. These are hard-working people who produce the wealth. Rich people are criminalizing and demonizing the people who put the food on their tables and give them fat bellies."

Velasquez denounced the hypocrisy of Republicans who advocate "family values," but push the "atrocious policy of separating parents from their children. This can't continue," he said urging young people to register and "vote those out of of-



fice who want to criminalize immigrants."

German-born Manuel Bartsch, a student at Heidelberg College, said he was locked up for 16 days while in High School for being undocumented. The case is on hold but "I'm in limbo. I don't know if I can get a job. I am going to be an active spokesman for the Dream Act" - the bill supported by Pres. Obama to allow undocumented children access to college loans and a path to citizenship.

Dramatizing the crisis, the rally was temporarily interrupted when Dahlberg got a frantic call from a woman whose husband had been arrested a few blocks away while en route to the event. A group rushed to the scene to find a Mexican worker, in handcuffs in a patrol car after being stopped for driving in a downtown bus lane. The man with six U.S.-born children, has worked for a commercial cleaning company in Akron for the past 15 years and has no drivers license or valid identification.

Although ICE was notified, the presence of media as well as a representative of Sen. Sherrod Brown, who happened to be at the rally and spoke to police, seems to have prevented any deportation action.

"The government needs to focus on real threats to public safety, not on intimidating immigrants trying to assemble for human rights," Dahlberg said.

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Thousands converge on first big day of protests

By John Wojcik

Thousands rallied and marched peacefully in downtown Chicago May 19 in the biggest protests so far against NATO, the relic of the cold war holding a May 20-21 summit here.

Daley Plaza in the Loop, which officially holds 5,000, was packed to capacity with crowds that spilled out into the surrounding streets and blocks. The rally was called by the nation's largest organization of nurses, National Nurses United, which had declared May 18, the eve of a G-8 gathering in Maryland and the NATO event here, a day of national action.

Thousands of nurses wearing their red union T-shirts and thousands of their supporters demanded passage of a "Robin Hood Tax," a financial transaction tax on all Wall Street deals which the nurses say would heal the economic disaster engulfing the world.

The highlight of the colorful and festive rally was a performance by the eminent musician and guitarist Tom Morello, of Rage Against the Machine fame.

Chicago, which is Morello's native city, threatened to move the rally away from the heart of downtown when word got out two weeks ago that he would perform. Morello, to the cheers of the thousands gathered at Daley Plaza, said that it was the power of a fighting union (the nurses) and public outcry that forced the city to allow the rally to go ahead at the originally planned location.

"They couldn't shut us down because we stood up," Morello said. "It was a few politicians, their skeezy lawyers and some trembling NATO generals who caved in."

Thousands of nurses in the crowd wore green Robin Hood caps to call attention to their demand for a tax on Wall Street stocks, bonds derivatives and other financial instruments that can raise up to \$350 billion yearly to mitigate the economic crisis they say was caused by the banks.

Ecuador busca democratizar acceso a la Universidad

Por Prensa Latina

El examen nacional de ingreso a la universidad, que se realizará el próximo día 19 por primera vez en Ecuador, busca democratizar el mecanismo existente hoy para acceder a la enseñanza superior en este país suramericano.

El titular de la Secretaría Nacional de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación, René Ramírez, declaró a Prensa Latina que ese es el propósito de la decisión adoptada en el país para realizar esta prueba.

Apuntó que tradicionalmente una élite socioeconómica ha tenido acceso a oportunidad de entrar en centros de altos estudios y por otra parte no es suficiente con la política pública de la educación gratuita, por lo cual se evalúa la aptitud, no los conocimientos en sí.

"No podemos decir que un pobre tiene menos aptitudes que un rico, lo que no tiene son opciones y buscamos identificar y fomentar que esos estratos sociales apliquen", afirmó Ramírez.

Argumentó que una evaluación de conocimientos evidenciaría un sesgo porque los pobres van a colegios de menor calidad generalmente.

Este proceso, dijo, permite un proceso de democratización, lo cual quedó demostrado con la prueba piloto realizada meses atrás a casi 46 mil estudiantes.

Se refirió a un examen de nivelación que se realiza además, debido a la heterogeneidad en el bachillerato existente en el país, lo cual da facilidades para la preparación y el acceso del estudiante a la universidad.

Un total de 129 mil 814 educandos se inscribieron para someterse a la prueba con miras a alcanzar un

cupó en la enseñanza superior.

Se informó que existen condiciones para dar respuesta a la demanda de los alumnos en todo el país, sin embargo, no podrán acceder a la enseñanza superior quienes no superen los 550 puntos sobre una base de mil.

Aquellos alumnos que no alcanzan ese puntaje, podrán superar sus deficiencias en una oportunidad.

La prueba, antecedida por una con carácter piloto, tendrá una duración de dos horas y contempla la evaluación de aptitudes verbales, razonamiento numérico y abstracto.

El mismo día se realizará una medición de conocimientos a cargo del Ministerio de Educación para evaluar la calidad de los contenidos y enfocar los programas a fin de corregir las dificultades.

Del total de inscritos para someterse a la evaluación, 85 mil 277 viven en la zona de la Sierra ecuatoriana, 39 mil 80 en la Costa, cuatro mil en el Oriente y 476 llegarán al país en esa fecha para acogerse al plan de becas.

La mayor cantidad de bachilleres busca acceder a la Universidad Central de Ecuador, por la cual optan 25 mil 240 candidatos, la Universidad de Guayaquil con 24 mil 924, la Universidad de Cuenca con 13 mil 943 y la Universidad Escuela Politécnica del Ejército (ESPE) con 12 mil 387.

El Gobierno concede 40 mil cupos adicionales para democratizar el acceso a la educación superior e igualdad de oportunidades.

También participan en esta ronda los estudiantes procedentes de las 14 universidades cerradas en el país recientemente por falta de calidad académica y quienes no tenían el 50 por ciento de los créditos vencidos.