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Labor to spend \$300 million to unseat GOP governors



By John Wojcik

Unionists and green groups, seeking to both create well-paying union jobs and improve the environment, are embarking on a “Repair America” campaign they hope will resonate with voters concerned about low incomes, citizens worried about climate change and lawmakers who will respond to pressure on both.

At least \$300 million will be spent by unions this year to unseat five GOP governors up for re-election in November.

The governors targeted for defeat are Florida’s Gov. Rick Scott, Michigan’s Gov. Rick Snyder, Ohio’s Gov. John Kasich, Pennsylvania’s Gov. Tom Corbett and Wisconsin’s Gov. Scott Walker.

The announcement of the list of gubernatorial battleground states was made at a press conference here this morning by Lee Saunders, chairman of the AFL-CIO’s political committee and by Mike Podhorzer, the federation’s political director. They made the announcement outside a meeting here of the AFL-CIO executive council which has been deliberating in Houston since Tuesday.

After the announcement, when Podhorzer was asked to discuss how much money labor would spend on the effort, he said he expected the dollar amount to exceed what unions spent in the 2010 midterm elections. The amount spent then,

he said, was about \$300 million.

Saunders and Podhorzer also said that maintaining Democratic control of the U.S. Senate would be an aim of the labor movement in the coming midterm elections. Podhorzer said that labor will put resources into eight states where Democratic incumbents face challenges and two states where Republicans can be defeated. He identified the eight states where labor would defend incumbent Democrats as West Virginia, Montana, Mich-

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igan, Louisiana, Iowa, Alaska, Arkansas and North Carolina and two states, Kentucky and Georgia, as the states where it was possible to defeat incumbent Republicans. (Sen. Mitch McConnell, the Republican Minority Leader in the Senate, for example, faces a serious challenge in Kentucky from

Labor has set its sight on defeating the GOP in the battleground states.

Democrat Allison Lundergan Grimes.)

Although no one here is saying that labor is giving up on wresting the House from Republican control, "the House is a real challenge," Podhorzer said. "Polls show that the generic House Democratic candidate is, at this point, one percentage point ahead of the generic Republican. To have a shot at ending Republican control of the House, due to the outrageous gerrymandering, we'd need to be 7 points ahead. But we're not giving up on making gains, particularly in the battleground states."

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said her union was fully in support of the decision to focus on state races.

"In many ways it is difficult to get anything done in Washington," she said. "In states like Pennsylvania, Michigan and Florida a war is being waged against the people and their standard of living. The states are where the people live and we want to focus on where the people are."

Labor intends to bring into those state level races a sharp focus on the issue of wages.

"All of our work in these elections," Trumka

said, "will be done in the framework of raising wages. We've just had polling done that shows conclusively that voters see their lives and political leaders through the lens of what those lawmakers are doing to raise wages and strengthen their livelihoods."

Trumka was referring to a Hart Research poll done from Feb. 8 to 11 in the five gubernatorial battleground states selected by the labor movement. Dissatisfaction with the economy, especially stagnant incomes, the poll found, is widespread in the five states and is weighing down approval ratings for GOP governors. Three in five voters say they are dissatisfied with the economic situation in their state. Those who are very dissatisfied outnumbered the very satisfied by a five to one ratio (25 percent to 5 percent).

The poll shows the issue of raising workers' wages could play a major role in 2014 races with Democrats standing to gain considerably if they give the issue a prominent place in their campaigns.



John Wojcik co-edits Peoplesworld.org

The struggle for equality continues

By PW Editorial Board

This Black History Month it is important to recognize that we are living in a period of transitions. Taking the offensive on economic and racial equality issues is key to building unity, defeating the right-wing majority in the House and stopping them from taking over the U.S. Senate in this year's election.

That level of racial barbarity continues to stain the political fabric of our nation. This is linked to and inspired by the movement that elected and reelected the first African-American president. That battle created a new, more active, more youthful multiracial and progressive electoral majority. That majority is still active and still fighting for the change they were promised.

The same goes for the left direction taken by the leadership of the AFL-CIO. They know that the labor movement is still in jeopardy and that they must be a big part of the electoral battles in 2014.

The Republicans are ready to make this election about thrashing the 'Affordable Care Act,'

hatred of Obama and "big government," guns and law and order - not jobs, economics and social justice. People should not be fooled by their talk about a "color blind" society. It has nothing to do with Martin Luther King's concept.

The Republican concept is not an attack on racism; it is an attack on those who are fighting racism.

The strategic role of the African-American people's struggle has to do with their being over 90 percent working class and being on the bottom of the economic ladder for so long. It grows out of an understanding of the unity of race and class consciousness; forged in the crucible of struggle against racial and class oppression. African Americans join unions for example, at a rate higher than any other racial group. And their role along with Latinos, women, LGBT and young people is indispensable to defending and advancing the U.S. labor movement and the overall fight for democracy.

Racism continues to stain the political fabric of our nation.

Postal workers warn about Staples deal

By Ben Markeson



Postal workers and their allies braved the cold and rain to hold a rally here outside of an east Orlando Staples store on Feb. 8. Their goal was to educate the public about the impact on the postal workers' jobs of a deal between the giant office supply chain and the United States Postal Service that has resulted in the opening of counters offering postal services at more than 80 Staples in four states.

"Outsourcing an essential public service to a for-profit corporation staffed with clerks making less than a livable wage and no accountability to the American public is completely irrational," said Steve Morris, president of American Postal Workers Union Local 1462, which represents 1,100 Postal Service employees in Central Florida.

"Not only does it jeopardize the safety and security of the U.S. mail system, but consumers are getting a bad deal, too," said Morris. The union points out that the Staples employees staffing the mail counters won't have the training and expertise required of career postal workers who must qualify for their assignments, pass a civil service exam to be hired, and take an oath to protect the U.S. mail.

"I'm here to lend support to the postal workers union," said Steve Wisniewski, president of Communications Workers of America Local 3108, which represents AT&T and Verizon workers in Central Florida. Offering postal services "in a non-union environment where workers don't have pensions, don't have quality health care, and they pay them a lot less is going to put a downward

force on the postal workers' ability to stay" in the middle class, Wisniewski said.

Postal workers earned an average of \$25.00 an hour in 2013, and have negotiated benefits such as health care. Non-managerial employees at Staples earn around \$8-\$9 an hour and often lack benefits. (Staples CEO Ronald L. Sargent was paid \$6.5 million in 2012.)

Staples' policies limit part-time workers to less than 25 work hours per week so they don't qualify for the company-funded health plan, according to Fight for Florida. The AFL-CIO-backed group organizes Floridians against what it calls an "assault" on the middle class by Florida's right-wing Gov. Rick Scott and Republican-controlled Legislature.

While the 25 participants held signs that said "Stop Staples-the U.S. Mail Is Not for Sale" and chanted, a small delegation entered the store to deliver a letter to the company. After waiting 20 minutes for a manager to come out of his office, Morris left the letter on the customer service counter and the delegation left, disgusted by the company's apparent lack of interest in APWU's concerns.

Staples CEO Sargent also has refused to meet with APWU national president Mark Dimondstein.

Outsourcing of public services makes no sense.

Activists demand justice for Jordan Davis

By Antoinette Laveaux

After four days of deliberation, the jury handed down guilty verdicts Saturday evening for Michael Dunn, a 47-yr-old software engineer, convicted on three counts of attempted murder in the second degree and a one count of open fire into a vehicle. However, the main count, that of first-degree murder of Jordan Davis, an African American teenager shot to death by Dunn, was declared a mistrial. State Attorney Angela Corey, who had unsuccessfully prosecuted George Zimmerman for killing unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin, who, like Davis, was African American, said she intends to re-try Dunn on the first-degree murder charge.

"We intend to fully push for a new trial ... Justice for Jordan Davis is as important as it is for any victim," Corey said.

In November 2012, while at a gas station here, Dunn demanded that Davis and his three friends turn down their music that he deemed too loud. They complied but then turned it back up again. Enraged, Dunn grabbed his gun from his car and shot into the car ten times, killing Davis. Dunn then drove away with his fiancée to a bed and breakfast in St. Augustine, 40 miles away. Dunn never called police.

After the announcement of the verdict a coalition organized a press conference. Speakers exposed the inherent racism involved in the crime and tied it to similar cases of criminalization of young black men.

El Pepe Mujica

Cubadebate.cu

José Mujica no descarta volver a dedicarse a vender flores cuando concluya lo que él llama "la changuita de ser presidente". Proyecta, además, instalar en su casa una escuela de oficios agrarios dirigida a formar a niños de familias humildes. En marzo de 2015 entregará la banda presidencial a un sucesor y desde ya se ha elegido a sí mismo para adoptar, como un uruguayo corriente, a unos 30 o 40 "gurises pobres" que vivirían con él y aprenderían a entenderse con la tierra.

El plan es apenas un botón de muestra del pensamiento de un político que desconcierta a quienes "descubrieron" —¡oh, raro hallazgo en estos tiempos!— al hombre de pueblo en el hombre de Estado. La gran prensa y las redes sociales le han colocado el rótulo de "el presidente más pobre del mundo" y hasta el de "el más excéntrico de América Latina", porque en este planeta, desdichadamente, la modestia se ha vuelto medio exótica.

Mujica replica con su verdad: él no es pobre, porque no necesita mucho para vivir, prefiere andar ligero de equipaje, y la austeridad le ayuda a "mantenerse libre". Tales argumentos, sin embargo, no hacen más que multiplicar el asombro de una humanidad más orientada a la golosina de la cebolla.

Oyéndole sus discursos impro-

visados (el reciente en La Habana fue simplemente magnífico) uno aquilata la riqueza de este presidente que dona el 87 por ciento de su salario para su partido y para programas sociales de construcción de viviendas y que nunca se ha mudado de su humildísima chacra (granja) de Rincón del Cerro, a unos 10 kilómetros de Montevideo, haciendo público desplante a la cómoda residencia presidencial.

En una época en que, por fortuna y elección, América Latina cuenta con varios líderes valiosos, destaca en el conjunto la oratoria fresca de este anciano que habla con la ternura de un niño, la poesía de la naturaleza y el recio alerta de un sabio.

Aunque siempre audaz, Mujica no siempre fue manso. Su cuerpo supo de seis balas y su expediente de guerrillero tupamaro le hizo pasar 14 años en prisión. En los peores tiempos, la cárcel era un agujero en el piso. Estuvo más de un año sin poder bañarse y siete sin leer nada; sus únicos amigos eran entonces unas ranas, unas ratas y las hormigas que se ponía en las orejas, para entretenerse. Con ellas compartía migas de pan.

Miles de uruguayos lo esperaron en el otoño de 1984, a la salida de la cárcel; en 2010, cuando asumió como presidente, pudo entenderse mejor qué habían visto en aquel recluso que recobraba la libertad.

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