

Indigenous alliance's national strike threatens Ecuador's conservative government

By W. T. Whitney Jr

A national strike is unfolding now throughout Ecuador under the auspices of the Ecuadorian Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE, as per Spanish-language initials). It is strong particularly in Cotopaxi, Tungurahua, and Pastaza provinces. Launched on June 13, the strike has continued for over a week.

On June 20, thousands of marchers entered Ecuador's capital, Quito. Students may allow some of them to enter Central University in Quito. The Alliance of Ecuadorian Organizations for Human Rights has registered 79 arrests, 55 protesters wounded, and 39 human rights violations.

Reporting from Puyo, in Pastaza province, Bob Shiers, a regular correspondent of the present writer, indicates that, as of June 18: "The only way one can get into Puyo is by foot, bicycle, or motorcycle... Buses and taxis are not operating... This protest consists of 40 different Indigenous groups who speak forty different languages... [T]he Ecuadorian media mainly shows photographs of people from Pichincha, Cotopaxi, and Imbabura provinces, which primarily represent the Quichua people.

"As of yesterday, the oil fields in the Amazonas were shut down. Crude now selling at more than \$110 a barrel. Everyday tens of thousands of dollars' worth of flowers are lost as the union workers at the airport refuse to load them onto planes... In Quito,

all the large retail stores are closed.

On May 20, an expanded council of CONAIE approved resolutions centering on improved quality of rural life, protection of nature, sustainable agriculture, and economic and political inequalities.

The basis for these resolutions, according to CONAIE, derives from "an analysis of the country's problems aggravated by a profound economic and institutional crisis, [which in turn stems from] dependence on the powers of the state, a pronounced

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widening of the inequality gap, and deepening of poverty generally. The national government turns its back on the majority population, favoring the big capitalists and submitting to the International Monetary Fund with its policies of privatization of strategic sectors and of plundering the country."



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Three weeks later, CONAIE announced the launching on June 13 of a “national mobilization of Indigenous peoples, producing sectors, small farmers, and diverse social organizations.” They presented a ten-point agenda outlining reforms addressing economic and human-rights injustices.

Demands included reduced gasoline and diesel prices; a one-year moratorium on family debts; better prices for agricultural products; more credit for farmers; improved education, transportation services and healthcare; labor rights; no mining in Indigenous areas; protection of water sources; attention to the rights of nature and to collective rights; and controls on privatization, price-gouging.

The government has relented to the extent of declaring a public health emergency and providing Ecuadorians with a “human development” bonus, a subsidy covering 50% of farmers’ fertilizer costs, partial cancelation of debts owed the Central Bank, and small low-interest loans for farmers.

CONAIE leader Leonidas Iza welcomed the

proposals, while pointing out their limited scope and lack of official validation. Iza “reiterated that CONAIE is preparing its entry into Quito in order to continue with anti-government demonstrations.” On June 18, his car came under attack. Bullets shattered one of its windows, but Iza escaped injury.

On the eighth day of the strike (June 21), Bob Shiers provided an update from Puyo: “The road I live on is more than a mile long and is connected at one end to the Puyo-Marcus highway and on the other end to the Puyo-Tenna highway. Right now as far as one can see, there are parked cars on both sides of the road. My landlady said they began arriving at sun-up. She said most cars contained at least four people. What this means, at least in Pastaza Canton, is that the adult bourgeois mestizos have joined the mobilization, even if it means they have a five-mile walk to get there. As my landlady said: ‘Lasso does not have a clue... His cabinet of bankers.’ My landlady’s store is down to tomatoes, flour, corn, rice, oatmeal, and banana!”

AFL-CIO: Supporting PRO Act is a litmus test for politicians wanting labor’s backing

By PAI

It was buried at the bottom of a long resolution detailing the need to rewrite and strengthen U.S. labor laws, making them pro-worker again, but the AFL-CIO has reiterated that candidates’ support for the Protect the Right to Organize (PRO) Act shall be a litmus test—though it didn’t use those words—for labor’s election endorsements.

The decision is no surprise. The late AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka made it part of a labor law platform plank in a major speech several years ago, and used the words, too. This language, at the end of Resolution 7, “The time is now for fixing America’s broken labor laws,” was blunt:

“We reaffirm our commitment, which we first made at the 2017 AFL-CIO Convention, that no candidate or elected official who fails to endorse and fight for these fundamental reforms should receive the support of working people,” it says.

In practical terms, that means unions won’t devote money or people to electing such labor foes this fall, regardless of their record on other issues. What it’s silent about is whether unions will actively campaign for those politicians’ foes, or sit out the elections involved.

Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., voted against the PRO

Act in 2019, though the Democratic-run House approved it. The state AFL-CIO uninvited him from its events the next year. After demonstrations at his office in 2021, he flip-flopped. But unions didn’t—and don’t—trust him.

Instead, big Oregon unions threw their support to his opponent in May’s Democratic primary, former AFSCME member Jamie McLeod-Skinner. Her union backers included the Service Employees, the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Oregon Nurses Association and the Oregon Education Association. The state’s Working Families Party backed her, too.

The Government Employees backed Schrader because he voted for the annual defense authorization bill, the only Oregon Democratic representative to do so. The Teamsters and the Carpenters also backed him, the Northwest Labor Press reported.

McLeod-Skinner criticized Schrader’s legislative record, saying “He’s fought negotiating lower drug prices, raising the federal minimum wage, and forgiving debt for college loans... When he does vote with Democrats, it is often after working to water-down the original ideas,” Ballotpedia reported. McLeod-Skinner defeated Schrader 57%-42%.

Unions won’t devote money or volunteers to electing anyone in the midterms who doesn’t support stronger labor laws, regardless of their record on other issues.

Detroit billionaire demands 10-year, \$60 million tax break, taking money from schools



By Cameron Harrison & Andrew Wright

The City Council postponed a vote on a questionable, additional \$60 million tax break for Bedrock Management Services LLC last Tuesday. The firm, which is owned by billionaire Dan Gilbert, has requested the tax break in order to “develop” the already-delayed Hudson’s project in downtown Detroit. The request would mark the project tax-free for 10 years.

This is notwithstanding the \$200 million in tax breaks Bedrock has already received from state and local subsidies. And the request comes despite the fact that Gilbert purchased the site, which is in a premium location downtown off of Woodward Avenue, for only \$1. The latest payout requested by Bedrock would cost Detroit Public Schools \$12 million in tax revenues and \$31 million from city taxes.

The majority of the sitting council members support the tax abatement. These members include James Tate, Latisha Johnson, Fred Durhal III, Scott Benson, and Coleman Young, Jr. It was recently reported on the same day that these members received donations from Gilbert’s political action committee.

Some of the council members who voted to delay the vote until this week question why Bedrock is asking for more funds at a time when the project is still ongoing. At the hearing, Council Member Angela Whitfield Calloway said, “This tax abatement is not needed for this project to be completed.... If we do not grant this tax abatement, I can assure you the project will go on. Mr. Gilbert has more than enough

money to complete his project. This is not going to benefit the average taxpayer.”

Additionally, Council Member Whitfield Calloway interrogated the claim of “promises of job creation,” which, in her view, are really attempts to “reel us in.” She made mention of the fact that the construction workers being hired for the project do not seem to be Detroit residents and that (Bedrock) should “take a walk over there and tell me who you see: I do not see anyone who looks like me on the project,” meaning the workers are predominantly non-Black, in a city that is 78% Black.

Molly Sweeney, a resident from District 2, stated during public comment that, “(Gilbert) made \$1 billion last quarter in profits, and we know our schools, our libraries, and our communities need those tax dollars. We need to figure out a way as a community to hold billionaires, like Dan Gilbert, accountable so our neighborhoods, our schools, and our libraries get the funding they deserve.”

As much of the city’s budget get filtered into blight removal projects in gentrification hotspots, the Detroit Police Department and surveillance projects, and improving technological infrastructure, such a large tax abatement will hurt residents who are adversely affected by these budgetary decisions.

Council Member Gabriela Santiago-Romero motioned to delay the vote until this week’s formal meeting, citing the amount of residents who called to voice their opposition. Residents were urged to call in to voice their concerns on Tuesday, June 21.

Billionaire Dan Gilbert of Bedrock Management Services already got \$200 million in tax breaks and scored a prime piece of real estate for only \$1.

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Anti-union Philadelphia Museum of Art bosses fire workers, eliminate pay—for years

By PAI

Between the coronavirus pandemic and bosses' implacable opposition to recognizing and bargaining with the union their workers want, some of Adam Rizzo's colleagues at the Philadelphia Museum of Art haven't seen a regular weekly paycheck—or one above the level of fast-food workers—for three years.

And that combination, in the workers' fight for a fair first contract, brought Rizzo and his colleagues, members of AFSCME District Council 47, to the front steps of the classical structure just outside downtown Philadelphia to dramatize their cause.

Joined June 14 by union leaders and members from the nearby AFL-CIO Convention, the workers made the point that the museum, a non-profit institution, acts like typical corporate bosses in terms of respect, dignity, and decent pay on the job.

That includes firing 100 of the staffers a few months before the union won 89% of the ballots in the pre-pandemic recognition vote, Rizzo said in an interview during the protest. NLRB records the August 2020 vote as 181-22. There's been futile bargaining and no contract since.

The remaining workers find the going hard. Rizzo explained that when the institution finally re-opened—only for four days a week—bosses didn't take everybody back. Instead, pleading part-time hours, they hired part-timers and temps, at much lower pay with no benefits.

So, needless to say, pay is the lead item on the table for the workers, along with benefits such as pensions and health insurance. If they ever get to the table.

¿Cámara de desinformación? Deforestación brasileña según Bolsonaro

By Bernardo Esteves

La semana pasada, el gobierno brasileño estableció un grupo de burócratas cuya misión es estudiar las cifras de deforestación y quema realizadas por el INPE (Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais), el Instituto Nacional de Estudios Espaciales. Esta Sala Consultiva Temática va a "revisar los datos" y determinar qué áreas fueron deforestadas legal e ilegalmente, según una resolución que fue publicada el jueves 2 de junio en el Diario Oficial de la Unión.

La nueva cámara tendrá representantes de cinco ministerios: Medio Ambiente, Agricultura, Defensa, Economía y Justicia. El Ministerio de Ciencia, que está vinculado al INPE, no participó. En efecto, la medida excluyó al instituto, responsable desde la década de 1980 de calcular la tasa oficial de deforestación amazónica, del proceso que va a determinar los datos sobre deforestación ilegal que el gobierno considere válidos. Esta legislación ambiental prevé casos en los que un propietario puede deforestar sus tierras. En las propiedades rurales ubicadas en la Amazonía, los productores están obligados por ley a dejar en pie el 80% de la selva (en la práctica, la mayoría de las propiedades se enmarcan en excepciones a esta regla, según encuesta encargada por piauí).

La creación de una cámara (de desinformación) para revisar las cifras de deforestación levantó las sospechas de los ambientalistas de que puede ser utilizada para maquillar datos sobre deforestación que el gobierno considera negativos. Este no es el primer intento del gobierno contra el INPE. En 2019, Bolsonaro dijo

que las cifras de deforestación eran mentiras y que el instituto actuaba "al servicio de alguna ONG", en un episodio que terminó con su exigencia a su ministro de Ciencia y Tecnología, Marcos Pontes, de la cabeza del físico Ricardo Galvão, exdirector del INPE. El presidente dejó en claro que le gustaría ver los números antes de que se publiquen. "No quiero que me atraquen con los pantalones bajados", dijo.

Piauí cuestionó al Ministerio del Medio Ambiente (MMA) sobre lo que significó la "revisión de los datos sobre deforestación y quemas". También preguntamos por qué el INPE, el IBAMA y el ICMBio no están representados en la cámara recién constituida. El ministro respondió con una nota que no aclaró ninguna de estas preguntas y no respondió a nuestra solicitud de más información. Aquí está la totalidad de la nota de MMA:

"El Ministerio del Ambiente aclara que la Resolución #11 del 25 de marzo de 2022 toma en cuenta la revisión de datos ya entregados y publicados por el INPE, por lo que la Sala Consultiva está integrada por órganos que poseen otras bases de datos: CENSIPAM (Ministerio de Defensa), Policía Federal (Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Pública), INCRA y SFB (Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Abastecimiento) y la Secretaría de Control Digital (Ministerio de Economía). Cabe aclarar que la composición de la Cámara Consultiva Temática fue aprobada por un órgano colegiado instituido por Decreto N° 10.142 del 28 de noviembre de 2019."

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