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Labor Conquers All

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Outpouring in Missouri Capital Demands End to Attacks on Labor Venezuela Crisis Is Different

Reprinted from *People's World*

By Tony Pecinovsky

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — "Today we are united, side by side. We have to stick together. If we lose, everyone who works for a living will pay the price," State Senator Gina Walsh told thousands of union members and their supporters as they rallied against anti-worker legislation here on the Capital lawn on Wednesday, March 26.

Walsh, who is also the president of the Missouri Building and Construction Trades Council, added, "Their number one priority is attacking your right to be in a union. It's a dangerous agenda designed to lower your wages and silence your voice."

Extremist leaders in the Missouri House are pushing a myriad of bills designed to weaken trade unions — and silence the workers they represent — here in the Show Me State.



For example, HB 1617, also known as "Paycheck Protection," and HB 1770, also known as "Right-to-Work" or "Worker Freedom," are on the House calendar and could be brought to the floor at any time.

Both HB 1617 and HB 1770 would dramatically weaken unions, as they would ban "union shops" and make it

more difficult for unions to collect dues. If passed, the bills would drive down wages and working conditions for all Missourians.

It is estimated that Missouri families would lose between \$1,945 and \$2,547 a year per-household if "Right-to-Work" were passed. Additionally, lower wages would mean less money for the schools, roads, bridges, and social services vital to a vibrant, modern economy.

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon added, so-called "Right-to-Work" would "pull the rug out from under hard working folks." He vowed to veto any anti-worker legislation that makes it to his desk.

"We cannot lift up our economy by tearing down workers," he added. "'Right-to-Work' is wrong. It'll move our state backwards. It is an ill-conceived race to the bottom. We've defeated it in the past. And we'll stop it again — just like we did in 1978."

It was in 1978 that the National Right-to-Work Committee was able to place on the Missouri ballot an initiative to pass "Right-to-Work" by popular vote. Many trade unionists fear that the Republican dominated Missouri legislature will attempt a similar ballot initiative this fall.

The 1978 "Right-to-Work" initiative was defeated overwhelmingly, with over 60 percent of Missouri voters voting against it.

However, with a shrinking union membership as a percentage of the electorate, Missouri union leaders know that they will have to reach out far beyond labor's ranks if they are going to defeat a similar initiative — if it makes it to the ...

This Time, Mostly

Reprinted from *People's World*

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

Opponents of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's socialist-inclined government have been in the streets and causing disturbances since earlier February. The course of events differs considerably from earlier campaigns directed at the "Bolivarian" governments of Maduro and President Hugo Chavez, Maduro's predecessor who died last year.

This time an orchestrated campaign of hoarding, price-gouging, and currency manipulation set the stage for the outburst. By contrast, the failed coup attempt against Chavez in April 2002 and the following series of protests and attacks on infrastructure before and after elections seemed to come out of the blue.

The unprecedented nature of the confrontation underway now is readily apparent as the process evolves. Its two-month duration is striking. So too is the toll of victims, 39 dead and over 600 wounded. The most remarkable feature of what's happening, however, is criminality.

Take, for example: burning the Housing Ministry and putting the lives of 200 workers at risk; vandalizing the Public Ministry (the federal prosecutor's office), also in Caracas; cutting down 5,000 trees to make barricades; setting most of the 300 recent forest fires; 60 masked men ransacking the Environmental Ministry in Táchira; destroying Park Service facilities and equipment at the cost of \$1.68 ...

Continued on Page 2

Continued on Page 2

Labor in Missouri, continued from page 1

... November ballot.

Secretary of State Jason Kander told the assembled union members, "I feel good. I feel optimistic. The reinforcements are here. The cavalry has arrived. I believe in workers' rights."

Kander echoed a widely held view that outside special interests like ALEC and the Koch brothers are the real backers behind the anti-worker push. He said, "I know Missourians are not clamoring for lower wages and fewer benefits."

Kander, a former U.S. Army captain and United Transportation Union Local 933 member, said so-called "Right-to-Work" and "Paycheck Protection" are nothing but veiled attempts to "go after your rights and go after your voice."

Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster added, "Powerful politicians want to cut your pay. They believe Missouri would be a better place if you made less money, if you had less power to bargain with, if they scrapped your pension, and if they divided you from one another. That is what 'Right-to-Work' is all about."

"They want to cut the pie a little more in their favor," Koster continued. "That's not my vision of a better Missouri."

Moderate Republican representative Anne Zerr (R-65) said unions provide "protection and guaranteed wages."

"Labor is not the enemy," she vowed to tell other Republicans "very quietly and very patiently. We're not going to do it by fighting. We're going to do it by education."

In fact, "Working with unions is good business," she added, as people with money in their pockets make our economy grow, which is something we all want regardless of party affiliation.

Democratic representative, Jake Hummel, fired the crowd up when he said, "This is what the union movement looks like in Missouri."

"We are under attack like never before. Our way of life is being threatened so millionaires can strip a few more dollars from your pockets," Hummel added. "They want more, more, more! But they need to know that we are sick of this attack and we're not going to put up with it."

"While labor is at a crossroads, it is also in the crosshairs. This isn't just about us, it's about all workers. And we have to fight! Take it home. Take it to your job sites. Take it to the ballot box. Remember those who stood with us and those who stood against us."

Crisis in Venezuela, continued from page 1

... million; burning health centers, buses, and electrical substations; charging motorists tolls for bypassing barricades; stringing wire close to barricades that, unseen, injures or kills passing motorcyclists; men marching onto a university campus, brandishing Molotov cocktails and sticks, beating students, and pouring gasoline onto rescue ambulances; and, lastly, the random drive-by shooting death of Nancy Pastora Ruiz de Ortega in Valencia. She was standing in line at a government-subsidized food market. Shooters wounded four others.

The picture is reminiscent of earlier historical junctures when opposition forces, short on unity and unprepared to make good on political programming, turned to chaos. It's the way of fascism.

Likewise in contrast to earlier confrontational situations, Venezuela's government is promoting dialogue. President Maduro since late February has reiterated a call for a "National Peace Conference." Regional peace conferences have taken place. On April 4, Maduro announced plans for a National Council for Human Rights aimed at investigating accusations of human rights abuses. And he proposed to the United States a binational commission "to promote peace and respect."

International organizations have weighed in this time. Responding to a Venezuelan government invitation, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) sent a delegation of foreign ministers on two occasions to evaluate and make recommendations, most recently on April 7-8. The diplomats called for "commitment to respect all human rights," and for peace talks. The United Nations office in Venezuela commended the government's efforts to lessen hostilities. In early March, the Organization of American States, responding to a call from U.S. ally Panama, issued a statement expressing solidarity with the government, condemning violence, and rejecting intervention against Venezuela.

Then there is Venezuela's western frontier: developments there are now playing into the crisis. In fact, anti-Chavez voting patterns have long characterized the western regions of Táchira, Mérida, Carabobo, Nueva Esparta, and Zulia. The first outbreaks of protests in early February took place in Táchira and Mérida, in addition to wealthy districts of Caracas.

The region features a history of separatist agitation and past experience of Colombian paramilitaries crossing into Venezuela, usually on drug-trafficking missions, or in past plots to remove President Chavez. Thus on April 3 President Maduro denounced a rightist plan "for separating several states of the Republic from Venezuela." Maduro read from a document which noted that "fusion with Colombia is not to be rejected."

Colombian paramilitaries reportedly once more are crossing into Venezuela, taking part in "bloody confrontations," cutting down trees for barricades, and planning to destroy an electrical substation in Táchira. Television news commentator José Vicente Rangel, citing military intelligence sources, claimed 200 paramilitaries were waiting in Colombia's Norte de Santander Department to cross.

Zulia is special. That small state in Venezuela's extreme northwest accounts for 9 percent of Venezuela's crude oil reserves, mainly in and around Lake Maracaibo. The potential is for 70 more years of extraction. Separatism has thrived there. The group "Our

Own Course" and ex-Governor Manuel Rosales led that cause. Living in exile now, Rosales opposed Chavez in the 2006 presidential elections.

Official U.S. government statements and congressional maneuverings in favor of economic sanctions suggest gratification among U.S. leaders that Venezuela's government is in trouble. Opposition demonstrations verging on the criminal, to which shortages, inflation, and President Hugo Chavez's loss

are added, do take on unprecedented seriousness. What is invariable, however, in this scenario and earlier ones is U.S. intervention. That's why for outsiders a big part of the story henceforth must be anti-imperialist resistance from any quarter, especially from within the United States and from the international community — as well as within Venezuela.



Photo: An anti-government protester burns a motorcycle belonging to the Bolivarian National Police in the Altamira neighborhood of Caracas, Venezuela, March 31, 2014. Alejandro Cegarra/AP

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