

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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January 21, 2011

Illinois: One pen away from abolishing the death penalty

By Pepe Lozano

The Illinois legislature recently passed landmark bills banning the death penalty, and awaits the governor's signature -- or veto -- placing the state in the center of the movement to abolish capital punishment.

The Illinois Senate voted 32-25, in favor of abolishing the death penalty, which came after the House approved the ban last week. The bill, SB 3539, will now be sent to Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn's desk for his signature.

Quinn has not said whether he will sign the measure into law. He has stated that he plans to review the bill "very carefully."

No one in Illinois has been executed for more than a decade after former Republican Gov. George Ryan issued a moratorium on the death sentence in 2000. Ryan's decision came after a series of revelations that people had been sent to Death Row who were later found to be innocent. More than a dozen of death row inmates were exonerated. Days before Ryan left office in 2003 he granted clemency to 164 Death Row inmates to ensure the system would not wrongly put anyone to death.

"How can you possibly give the power of life and death to a prosecutor, who even if he does everything correctly, there's still that possibility that



you're going to strap an innocent person to a gurney," said Gordon "Randy" Steidl.

Steidl spent 17 years behind bars, including 12 on Death Row, after he was wrongfully convicted of a 1986 double-murder. He pleaded with lawmakers this week to repeal the death penalty, a system that nearly cost him his life and has taken away almost two decades of it.

The measure's current sponsor State Sen. Kwame Raoul, a Democrat from Chicago, said

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ending the death penalty is the right thing to do because the system has caused too many mistakes. "We have an historic opportunity... to join the civilized world and end this practice of risking putting to death innocent people," he said. Illinois ought to be embarrassed by its track record of wrongful

Supporters are hopeful that Gov. Quinn will sign the bill.

convictions, noted Raoul. "Because if an execution were to take place, it takes place in the name of the people of Illinois."

During the senate debate others said the system is broken and Illinois should break company with countries like Afghanistan, China, Iran, Iraq, Congo, Saudi Arabia and others that allow the death penalty.

"We're here because we've seen countless examples of the fact that the system has failed," said State Sen. Toi Hutchinson, a Democrat from Olympia Fields. "This question is not about the people who we know did it. It's about the people who were convicted who didn't. It's about our system of justice is actually predicated upon the protection of innocent and executing one innocent person is too high a price to pay."

Supporters are hopeful that Gov. Quinn will sign the bill. They urge people to call Quinn's office at 217-782-6830 and leave a message telling him how excited and happy they are that Illinois

is moving in the right direction of ending capital punishment for good.

Retired Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, once a death penalty supporter, recently spoke out for its abolition, saying it's so shot through with racism and politics that it cannot be fixed.

Illinois has executed 12 people since the mid-1970s. Fifteen people are currently on death row in the state.

Thirty-five states continue to authorize the death penalty. Illinois would become the 16th state to abolish it, if signed into law. In recent years, New York, New Jersey and New Mexico have outlawed the death sentence.

The number of executions in the U.S. dropped 12 percent last year. Advocates of ending the death sentence say more needs to be done to ban the broken system nationwide.



Pepe Lozano writes for the People's World.

Martin Luther King Jr. and the attack on public workers

By PW Editorial Board

How ironic. As we celebrate the life and historic contributions of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, public workers are under fierce attack across the country. As the economic crisis worsens for working people there is a coordinated campaign by big business, the newly energized, tea party Republican right, and some Democrats to resolve the crisis on the backs of public workers.

Can you imagine the folks who just got hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax breaks getting indignant at the wages of sanitation workers? What the top 1% of the rich will each get just in tax breaks alone would provide decent, livable wages for several sanitation workers for a whole year. Such bald faced hypocrisy is the currency of these attacks.

Can there be any doubt that if alive today, Dr. King would be leading the fight to defend all public workers and the fight for jobs. In Memphis, Dr. King brought together two mighty currents of the struggle for economic and social justice. Two deeply kindred currents: labor and civil rights; labor and communities of working people who face

racism and discrimination.

And can there be any doubt where he would stand on the issues of the day? For instance so many states are now proposing right-to-work-for-less laws and other measures to deny basic union rights to public service workers. Dr. King famously said, "In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as 'right-to-work.' It provides no 'rights' and no 'works.' Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining... We demand this fraud be stopped."

King would never have allowed anyone to separate the interests of public workers from those who need the public services they provide. And he was keenly aware of the issue of how to finance needed social programs. Most of us vividly remember his statement that "the bombs in Vietnam explode at home; they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America", and, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

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Banks seize over one million homes in 2010

By Joe Sims

Banks seized more than one million homes last year, a new record - and that figure would have been even higher but for a temporary moratorium by several banks on foreclosures late last year due to improper and shoddy paperwork.

This year the numbers are sure to be even higher still. "About 5 million borrowers are at least two months behind on their mortgages and more will miss payments as they struggle with job losses and loans worth more than their home's value, industry analysts forecast," says the Associated Press.

The rate of foreclosures, however, has slowed. Nevada led the nation with one in 11 homes receiving foreclosure notices, a drop of 5 percent from the year before. Arizona too was hit hard with one in 17 households unable to keep up payments, says CNN.

The main cause of the ongoing foreclosure crisis is continuing high unemployment.

The severity of the crisis seems to have outstripped Obama administration efforts to stem it with its Home Affordable Modification Plan. "By April, it became apparent that the program was losing the foreclosure fight; there were reports of 10 new defaults for every HAMP modification and the projections for the number of borrowers who would actually receive a HAMP modification had nose-dived to 1 million from 4 million."

In addition, upwards of 75 percent of those receiving assistance were expected to default because of other severe debt problems. Approximately 435,000 homeowners received assistance last year.

Nationally, the brunt of crisis is in a small number of states. "More than half of the country's foreclosure activity came out of five states in 2010: California, Florida, Arizona, Illinois and



Michigan. Together, these states recorded almost 1.5 million households receiving a filing, despite year-over-year decreases in California, Florida and Arizona," says the New York Times.

State attorneys general from across the country have joined together to probe the banks involved in the shoddy paperwork and "robosigning" scandal. "Last week, the AGs announced they will soon settle with the five biggest banks that together have 59 percent of the mortgage-servicing market: Bank of America Corp., Wells Fargo, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, and Ally Financial," says a recent article.

In Massachusetts recently consumers won a significant victory when the state Supreme Court ordered US Bancorp and Wells Fargo to "return two homes seized in foreclosure because they couldn't prove they owned the homes when they began the legal actions," says MSN Money.

It is estimated that close to 13 million homes will be foreclosed on before the crisis is over. The Center for Responsible Lending estimates that 17 percent of Latino and 10 percent of African American homeowners will lose their homes.

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LOCAL NEWS

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Tucson honors MLK, shooting victims

By Alexander M. Maldonado

In honor of Martin Luther King Jr and his birthday holiday, hundreds of people "marched" two miles to Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' office in a Walk for Peace, Jan. 16, for all that perished, the victims and "Gabby."

A banner with participants signatures and heartfelt messages preceded the 400-plus people in the walk, and was left at Giffords' office along with all the balloons and stuffed animals already placed at the growing vigil.

The trek, participants said, was not only for those that perished and the other victims but also for each person there to begin to heal and demonstrate how Tucson was together in this ordeal.

On a sad note, Dorwan Stoddard was laid to rest on the same day. He had shielded his wife from Jared Lee Loughner's bullets, and was shot to death at the Safeway store. His daughter-in-law said he died showing his love for his wife and there was no better way for him to go. Mr. Stoddard represented the good that is Tucson and will be missed.

At another weekend memorial, a moment of silence was observed at University Medical Center here one week after to the minute of the time of the shooting.

Tucson has gone from the angered, dazed, weeping days to comforting total strangers with an embrace or simple words of encouragement. Tucson has been through a lot this past year, with SB1070 and HB2281 (the ban on Ethnic Studies) but for the time being, politics have been put aside and people are looking at each other as simple human beings.

Denuncia Partido Comunista EEUU tiroteo en Arizona e instigamiento

Especial para Mundo Popular

El sábado 8 de enero, la congresista Gabrielle Gifford, el juez federal John Roll y muchos otros, incluyendo una niña de 9 años, fueron abaleados mientras se desarrollaba una concentración política en el estacionamiento de un supermercado Safeway en Tucson, Arizona.

En términos muy categóricos, el Partido Comunista de los Estados Unidos condena fuerte e inequívocamente este acto atroz de violencia. Extendemos nuestras condolencias a las familias y a los amigos de las víctimas. Y esperamos la pronta recuperación de todos los heridos, incluyendo a la congresista Gifford.

La policía reportó que tiene en custodia a un individuo blanco de 22 años llamado Jared Lee Loughner como sospechoso del tiroteo. Todavía no está claro si el sospechoso actuó a solas o si hubo cómplices.

Muchos tildan a estos acontecimientos como tragedia, y sí lo es. Pero es más que una tragedia.

Hasta el momento no sabemos el motivo de este crimen, pero conjeturan muchos que la motivación es política debido a la atmosfera de lenguaje violento y amenazante contra la congresista Gifford y otros congresistas demócratas. Cualquiera sea la motivación, política o no, el movimiento de extrema derecha del tea party y su retórica rabiosa antigobiernista creó la atmosfera que permitió y estimuló el ataque. Como ejemplo, Sara Palin tenía señalado el distrito electoral de

la congresista Gifford con una mirilla de fusil, indicando que ella había votado en el Congreso a favor de la ley de reforma de la salud. Esta señal fue removida el día del ataque.

La congresista Gifford declaró en televisión, cuando los violentos penetraron en su oficina de Arizona y la destrozaron luego que fue aprobada la ley de salud con su voto, que el discurso político de odio tiene sus consecuencias con estas palabras: "Palin ha señalado con una mirilla de fusil nuestro distrito; la gente tiene que darse cuenta que estas acciones tienen sus consecuencias". Gifford ha sido blanco frecuente de los ataques del tea party. De igual forma, el juez Roll, republicano, ha recibido amenazas frecuentes de parte de la ultraderecha.

El hilo conductor de la retórica de la violencia no termina con Palin y su tea party. Continúa con la dirigencia política del Partido Republicano en Arizona, que ha fomentado leyes y política conducentes a la violencia, comenzando con la ley antiinmigrante SB 1070 y la proscripción de estudios étnicos. Dirigentes como son la Gobernadora Jan Brewer, el Alguacil del Condado de Maricopa, Joe Arpaio, tienen tanta responsabilidad en el fomento de la violencia que Palin y compañía.

Esta es una versión editada del texto. Para la declaración completa, visite: www.mundopopular.org/denuncia-partido-comunista-eeuu-tiroteo-en-arizona-e-instigamiento/

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