Activist Workers' Wish/Demand List To Obama

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
25 January 2009

Critical Comment

Culture Change Letter #231 -
Regarding the "Open Letter to Barack Obama on Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign" --
widely circulated by the Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign, emanating from a publication called The Organizer in San Francisco, California -- it's clear there's something most activists don't get about The System and their relationship with the Earth. Until they do, they can elect an Obama by any margin of victory and remain unfulfilled and downtrodden.

As an activist on many email lists, and representing an organization that tries to network with as many people as possible for culture change and climate protection, I received this letter on workers' needs that was submitted to the new President of the U.S.

Cindy Sheehan and Cynthia McKinney, both of whom I've met and respect, were among the many signatories, and, since I'm not in the labor movement, were the only names I knew. Besides these two radical, outspoken women there was not one person on the list who is known for grasping the relationship between energy, ecology and economics. I don't discount the need for social justice. One of the additional signatories is with the National Lawyers Guild, a gutsy organization protecting the rights of protesters.

The rest of the signatories most likely do not openly question the existing system that threatens us all, nor do they have an ecological grounding for doing so. They joined in making a demand for an unworkable and narrowly financial set of relief measures. People want "a piece of the pie." But, as Richard 'Ecocity' Register asks, "What if it's an arsenic pie?"

It would have made more sense to demand food distribution and access to land to garden and farm it, because the house of cards cannot promise more and more jobs.

This movement to reform the status quo seeks minor reform, no change in culture, and maintains a denial of energy reality and the ecological crisis. The Letter is not about fundamental change or offering of an alternative system.

Redistributing the wealth can be a radical idea, but when it has no plan other than asking for Presidential policies that would mostly have to go through Congress, we have to ask, "What are you, the pleading parties, going to do about it if you don't get what you want?" Also, "Does it occur to you that it's time to ask basic questions: How many people can the ecosystem support? Is growth of the economy or the population automatically a good thing, and is it sustainable?"

The priorities in this demand and wish-list are not for a healthy ecosystem or a renewed relationship with nature but rather a non-green desire to continue the "prosperity" of material conveniences associated with technological progress for mass consumption. Let us quarrel with specific demand-items:

"We cannot accept the destruction of our jobs" -- Accept it, even though jerks caused it.

"[T]his crisis is not of our making and we should not be made to pay for it." -- To the extent that people did not lift a finger to live in such ways to cut energy use, save money and stop wasting resources, and believed the Earth is something to use up, then the crisis is of everyone's making and we must all pay for it, no matter if there were some who consumed in utter gluttony when the rest of the people dreamed of doing it too.

"It's time to bail out working people." -- Freedom cannot be given; it needs to be taken. Same with justice and the basic necessities of life. It's time for concerned folks to make deep changes and build new community structure instead of asking for or demanding help.

"Guarantee fully funded pensions for retirees, along with healthcare and other benefits."-- Alas, this is probably not possible because the crash has begun. The reforms to The System that could have allowed these demands needed to be made decades ago, but people were too passive and apathetic -- preferring to believe in the next election which is the easy way to do nothing proactive or risky.

"Re-tool the auto industry to build rapid mass transit, solar, and wind systems." -- where will the energy for this come from? What about retooling for bikes, which are lower tech and don't require further energy?

"End all funding for the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and bring our troops home now. The war expenditures in these countries alone are estimated at $3 trillion. Redirect all war funding to meet human needs." -- Good one. But what are workers and the average citizen going to do, use less oil? What are human needs -- endless appliances and idiotic, dispiriting forms of employment?

"Enact a massive national reconstruction public works program (minimum expenditure needed of $1 trillion) to rebuild the nation's schools, hospitals and crumbling infrastructure and to put millions of people back to work at a union-scale wage..." -- If a school building's not crumbling, should it be rebuilt? Are the schools the best place for children and for learning? Why are they not at home, and why is it okay for both parents to be absent from home? Are hospitals really supportive of healing, or are they part of the problem in the health of the average person who doesn't prevent disease but reacts to it with drugs, surgeries and radiation?

The crumbling infrastructure cannot be rebuilt without cheap energy which is gone. The road/pavement aspect of the infrastructure should be torn up in order to better utilize land and grow food. Workers strikes and a revolution to right the wrongs are anachronistic if the object is to bargain for more dollars or even seize the means of production -- production that depends on endless cheap energy -- to make more plastic crapola (thank you Jim Kunstler)?

The workers need a revolution to follow that offers actual change to the socioeconomic structure that recognizes the limits of the Earth's materials and life-support systems. There's no social justice or jobs on a dead planet. The leaders are you, and the purported "leaders" need to follow the people who may be forced to begin cultivating their own ecosystems and neighborhoods to recreate community and restore our former evolutionary journey featuring tribal, traditional ways that worked well enough for untold millennia.

It's encouraging that The Organizer responsible for the letter below has taken a tougher stance against Obama for bowing to corporate interests regarding the recent release of the second half of the bailout funds ($350 billion); this other letter follows the first.

From: Alan Benjamin, Editor

The Organizer

January 25, 2009

Open Letter to Barack Obama on Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign

Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign

San Francisco, California

January 20, 2009

Dear President Barack Obama,

On November 4, 2008, millions of Blacks, Latinos, youth, and working people of all backgrounds seized on this election to say: Enough is enough, racism and oppression must end now. In the context of the deepening economic crisis, the election also was a cry from working people: We cannot accept the destruction of our jobs, our homes, our public services and our communities -- this crisis is not of our making and we should not be made to pay for it.

We, the undersigned, call upon you to submit to the Congress an economic recovery program that bails out working people -- NOT Wall Street. We also call on the AFL-CIO, Change to Win, and the organizations representing Blacks, Latinos, antiwar, immigrant rights and other social protest activists to endorse this 10-point platform of the Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign:

1) Put a halt to the Wall Street bailout plan. Not one more penny should be earmarked to bail out the bankers and speculators. It's time to bail out working people.

2) Enact a moratorium on all home foreclosures, utility shut-offs, evictions and rent hikes. Nationalize the mortgage industry, including Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

3) Enact H.R. 676 -- the universal, single-payer healthcare plan. Take the private insurance companies out of the healthcare equation. Guarantee fully funded pensions for retirees, along with healthcare and other benefits.

4) Enact the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) so that every worker can have union representation.

5) Stop the layoffs in auto and other industries across the country. Nationalize the Big 3 automakers. Re-tool the auto industry to build rapid mass transit, solar, and wind systems.

6) Stop the scapegoating of immigrant workers. Stop the ICE raids and deportations.

7) End all funding for the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and bring our troops home now. The war expenditures in these countries alone are estimated at $3 trillion. Redirect all war funding to meet human needs.

8) Enact a massive national reconstruction public works program (minimum expenditure needed of $1 trillion) to rebuild the nation's schools, hospitals and crumbling infrastructure and to put millions of people back to work at a union-scale wage. Provide all necessary funding for a genuine Reconstruction program in the Gulf Coast; enact the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act (H.R. 4048).

9) Defend and expand the rights and economic security of those who are unable to work. Grant living-wage benefits to single parents, disabled, seniors, and the unemployed. End the arbitrary, punitive time limits, sanctions, denial of education, and forced unwaged workfare in the TANF welfare program.
10) Tax the corporations and the rich -- not working people -- to finance a workers' recovery plan. The rich currently enjoy historically high levels of wealth while being taxed at bargain-basement rates. Implement a retroactive tax on windfall revenue on the oil-energy industry, return capital income taxation to 1981 levels, and repatriate the $2 trillion from the offshore tax havens.

INITIAL LIST OF CAMPAIGN SUPPORTERS (partial list of 500 endorsers; * org & title listed for id. only):

Nancy Wohlforth* (Co-Pres., Pride at Work/AFL-CIO, Vice Pres., California Federation of Labor)

Cindy Sheehan (Gold Star mother, antiwar activist)

Cynthia McKinney (former Member of Congress, 2009 Green Party presidential candidate)

Donna Dewitt* (President, South Carolina AFL-CIO)

Progressive Democrats of America

Nativo López (Hermandad Mexicana)

Colia Clark (veteran of the Civil Rights Movement)

Michael Eisenscher* (AFT Local 1603, OPEIU Local 3)

Mark Dudzic* (National Organizer, Labor Party)

Dennis Serrette* (Political Director, Communications Workers of America)

Bruce Dixon (Editor, Black Agenda Report)

Kali Akuno (Gulf coast reconstruction activist)

Gene Bruskin (labor and antiwar activist - Washington, D.C.)

Larry Pinkney* (Black Activist Writers Guild & The Black Commentator)

Al Rojas (Coordinator, Frente de Mexicanos en el Exterior)

Alan Benjamin (Editor, The Organizer)

Glen Ford (BlackAgendaReport.com)

Chris Silvera (Sec.-Treasurer, Teamsters Local 808, Long Island City, NY)

Traven Leyshon* (Pres., Washington - Orange - Lamoille Labor Council, Vermont)

Fred Hirsch* (Exec. Bd., Plumbers and Fitters Local 393, San Jose, CA)

Rev. Elston K. McCowan* (Public Sector Dir., SEIU Local 2000; current candidate for Mayor of St. Louis, MO)

Bill Leumer (Workers Action)

Leonel Nixon* (Universal African Peoples Organization-St. Louis/Chicago)

Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez (Institute for Multiracial Justice)

Kentucky May Day Coalition

Renée Saucedo* (La Raza Centro Legal)

Andy Griggs* (Chair, National Education Assoc., Peace & Justice Caucus; UTLA)

Howard Wallace* (Pride at Work)

Clarence Thomas* (Exec. Bd., ILWU Local 10)

Don Bechler* (Single Payer Now!)

George Hutchinson* (Pacific Green Party, former OEA member)

Mike Carano* (Progressive Democrats of America-Ohio, Teamsters' union)

Jerry Gordon* (UFCW International Rep/retired; Chair, Ohio State Labor Party)

Ed Rosario (Co-Convener, OWC Continuations Committee)

Pat Gowens (Welfare Warriors)

Luis Magaña (Organización de Trabajadores Agrícolas de California)

Tim Kaminski* (UAW Local 110, former committeeman, retired)

Gustavo Bujanda (Raices Mexicanas)

Nancy Romer* (Professional Staff Congress, CUNY, AFT 2334)

Frank Martin del Campo* (Exec. Bd. member, S.F. Labor Council)

Mark Esters* (member, UAW-St. Louis, Missouri)

Jack Rasmus (Economist, Professor St. Mary's College)

Juan Rafael Santos* (South Central Farm Leadership Council)

Wes Brain* (Southern Oregon Jobs with Justice)

Adam Richmond (Committee to Overturn Prop 8)

James Vann* (Oakland Tenants Union)

Luis Alberto Rivera (President, PRD en el Exterior)

Jean Pauline* (SF Gray Panthers)

Akinyele Sadiq (The Troublemakers Union - band)

Hal Sutton* (UAW Local 1268 retirees chapter)

Filemon López (Radio Bilingüe)

Kristen Zehner* (AFSCME Sub Chapter 52)

C. T. Weber* (Peace and Freedom Party/California State Employees Association)

Dale Sorensen* (Task Force on the Americas)

Helen Spalding (AFSCME retiree)

David Walters* (IBEW Local 1245)

Randy Lopez* (By Any Means Necessary / Sacramento BAMN)

Jessica Sanchez (Workers' International League-S.F.)

Rodger Scott* (AFT Local 2121, retired)

Jose Luis Jaral Moreno (Comité Binacional de Derechos Humanos de los Migrantes)

Millie Phillips (Socialist Organizer)

Páramo Hernandez (Union Civica Primero de Mayo)

Steve Ongerth* (IWW, IBU SF Bay Region)

Vinnie Burrows* (AEG, SAG, AFTRA-NY)

Chris Kaihatsu* (Rev.Left.com)

Dan Kaplan (Exec. Sec., AFT Local 1493)

Ann Robertson* (California Faculty Association, SFSU)

Marc Rich* (UTLA delegate, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor)

Paul Burton* (Northern Calif. Mdia Workers, CWA 39521, San Mateo Labor Council)

Allan Fisher* (AFT Local 2121)

Roger Dittman (Professor Emeritus, Physics, Cal. State Univ.-Fullerton)

Lisa North* (AFT Local 2)

James Keys* (Senior Action Network and SF Mental Health Board)

Larry Duncan* (CWA 14408, Co-Producer, Labor Beat-Chicago)

Marlena Santoyo* (Philadelphia Federation of Teachers)

Brian L. Rich* (Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights)

Laurence Shoup* (UAW 1981, retired)

Dennis Gallie* (UAW Local 249)

Rodrigo Ibarra (Co-Editor, El Organizador)

Kathy Lipscomb* (Exec. Bd, Senior Action Network - S.F.)

Jim Hamilton* (Member State Exec. Com., AFT Missouri)

Linda Ray* (SEIU Local 1021, San Francisco)

Ken Hollenbeck* (CWA 6300 delegate to St. Louis Labor Council

Roger T. Harris* (Task Force on the Americas, Corte Madera, CA)

Herb Johnson* (Missouri State AFL-CIO)

T. Rodgers (Sidewalk University, Los Angeles)

Lisa North* (UFT-AFT Local 2 - N.Y.)

Eugene Frison (Retired, St. Louis Court Workers' leader)

Rogelio Reyes (Prof., San Diego State University)

Mark Demming* (National Lawyers Guild, Oakland, CA)

Nikhil Kothegal* (AFT Local 420, St. Louis)

Robley E. (Rob) George* (Center for the Study of Democratic Societies)

Julie Utley (T.A. , St. Louis County Special School District)

Patty Jaundzems* (OPEIU Local 3)

Mark Vorpahl* (SEIU Local 49, Portland, OR)

Paul Joseph Poposky (Workers International League - St. Louis)

Francesca Rosa* (SEIU Local 1021, delegate to SF Labor Council)

Kathleen Densmore* (Phd., community activist, San Francisco)

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Paul Colvin* (Communications Workers of America-ITU, retired)

Paul Lenart (IWW Organizing Committee-Reno, Nevada)

Michael Flynn* (National Lawyers Guild-Oakland)

Mary Moore* (Bohemian Grove Action Network)

Larry Lambert* (Coachella Valley MDS)

Helen Spalding* (AFSCME Local 1844, retired)

Joanne Husar (filmmaker, Los Angeles)

Col. Jeffrey Segal, Esq. (Louisville, Kentucky)

Eric Blanc (youth organizer - San Francisco)

Karen Parker* (Association of Humanitarian Lawyers)

Jack Chernos* (American Federation of Musicians Local 6)

Greg Miller* (Freelancers Union - San Francisco)

Francisca Ramos-Stierle (Metta Center for Nonviolence Education)

Esther John* (AFT-Seattle)

Donald Leisman* (AFT Local 420 - St. Louis)

Brian Hill (environmental activist, Eugene, Oregon)

Aaron Schuman* (NWU/UAW 1981 - Ithaca, N.Y.)

Steve Kessler* (member, Bay Area Labor Committee for Peace and Justice)

[Campaign initiated by The Organizer Newspaper. For more info, or if wish to support the Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign (WERC), contact or go to wercampaign.org.

P.O. Box 40009, San Francisco, CA 94109, or call 415-641-8616.]

Not One More Penny for Wall Street!

No Tax Cuts for the Corporations!

By ALAN BENJAMIN, January 25, 2009

Over the past three weeks, President Barack Obama has signaled his intent to promote corporate interests at the expense of working people in the name of addressing the growing economic recession that is sweeping our country.

In relation to both the disbursement of the second half of the Paulson bailout package for Wall Street and the tax cuts contained in the proposed economic stimulus plan, Obama has bent to the pressures of the corporations and the ruling rich. In both cases, working people -- and the trade union movement, in particular -- need to weigh in immediately to defeat the corporate attacks contained in these plans.

1. - Not One More Penny to Bail Out the Bankers!

On Jan. 9, 2009, then President-elect Barack Obama publicly asked George W. Bush to request that the U.S. Congress release immediately to the banks and financial institutions the second half of the $700 billion Paulson bailout fund. Bush promptly honored this request, and, two days later, the release of this fund was approved by the U.S. Senate -- without any hearings or much discussion. The matter is now before the House of Representatives.

Nationally syndicated columnist Robert Scheer explained in his Jan. 14, 2009, column why working people and the Congress should oppose releasing these $350 billion to the banks and speculators. Scheer writes, in part:

"Why rush to throw another $350 billion of taxpayer money at the Wall Street bandits and their political cronies who created the biggest financial mess since the Great Depression? And why should we taxpayers be expected to double our debt exposure when the 10 still-secret bailout contracts made in the first round are being kept from the public?

"We don't have time, President-elect Barack Obama's key economic adviser Lawrence Summers insisted in a letter to Congress on Monday [Jan. 12], promising that the new infusion would not be squandered as was the first installment. But given that Summers is personally as responsible for this meltdown as anyone, why should we trust him on this? Yes, it sounds wonderfully bipartisan that Obama is backing President Bush's request for spending the money now, short-circuiting congressional inquiry, but it was just that sort of bipartisan politics that created this nightmare.

"How insulting that we must now accept Summers' assurance that the Obama administration will 'move quickly to reform a weak and outdated regulatory system to better protect consumers, investors and businesses.' This from the guy who,

as President Bill Clinton's Treasury secretary, pushed the deregulation legislation making the subsequent financial crimes of Wall Street legal. The 'toxic derivatives' that we taxpayers are now forced to purchase from the Wall Street hustlers were deliberately shielded from all government regulation, thanks to the Commodity Futures Modernization Act, which Summers got Congress to pass in the closing days of the Clinton administration with the same urgency that he now pushes for the new Wall Street handout.

"Where is the openness and accountability that Obama promised? Why not pause for a few weeks for congressional hearings on how to spend the new money? We don't even know where the last batch went. Š That is outrageous. This is our money we're talking about." (San Francisco Chronicle, Jan. 14, 2009)

Not one more penny should be earmarked to bail out Wall Street. It's time to bail out working people.

This demand has been echoed in a report adopted unanimously by the delegates' meeting of the San Francisco Labor Council (AFL-CIO) on Jan. 12, 2009. The report states, in part:

"Any bailout must be for workers, their families, children, students, seniors, small farmers, small business -- the everyday folks. This financial collapse can be traced to the three-decade suppression of workers' wages and living standards. A massive stimulus is required to stabilize, retain and employ the working class in productive work, and to keep businesses, small farmers, and goods and services which serve ordinary people from further decline or economic 'wipe out.'

"Bailing out Wall Street is pouring tax dollars down a sinkhole. Wall Street and Main Street cannot both be bailed out at the same time, because Wall St. is about profiting from speculation, and the bail-out is funding the speculation. We need to fund Main Street by sustaining the public sector, building a productive economy -- not financial speculation -- and by halting foreclosures and defaults."

The first time the Wall Street bailout was sent to the Congress, it was defeated - as millions of people sent letters to their representatives urging a "VOTE NO ON THE WALL STREE BAILOUT!" This can and must happen again today.

2) No Tax Credits to the Corporations and the Rich! Make Them Pay Their Fair Share!

On Jan. 15, House Democrats rolled out the details of Obama's $825 billion economic stimulus package. The package calls for $550 billion in new spending and $275 billion (or 33%) in tax cuts, mainly for Big Business. The mainstream media explained that the tax cuts were included in the package to appease the Republicans.

Nobel Prize economist Joseph Stiglitz wrote an article titled "Do Not Squander America's Stimulus on Tax Cuts" (Financial Times, Jan. 16) in which he takes issue with the Obama's tax-credit plan. He wrote:

"Obama has proposed to use nearly 40 percent of the stimulus for tax cuts [note: that percentage was lowered to 33% in House version of stimulus plan -- A.B.]. Š Tax breaks for business may prove to be a sinkhole as bad as the troubled assets relief program. Particularly worrisome are rumors that companies will be allowed to set off their losses against profits made in the past five years to get tax rebates -- a big gift to those who mismanaged risk, including banks such as Citibank.

"And there is a more fundamental point that the Bush team missed. Tax cuts have increased our national debt."

The report adopted by the San Francisco Labor Council on Jan. 12 also noted that these cuts "would have little impact," while pointing out that the Obama plan would not be big enough to create the number of jobs needed in the current situation. "This [proposed stimulus package of $550 billion] is far short of the $1+ trillion stimulus that virtually all the 'outside' economists and the Congressional Progressive Caucus are insisting is needed at a minimum."

But the Labor Council report opposed the tax cuts for the corporations and rich from a working class perspective. "The recovery plan must put people first. Putting forward a workers' recovery plan becomes our job, Labor's job, in coalition with existing and potential allies and community allies already engaged in fighting the crisis. To implement this recovery program, Labor will need to mobilize union members and their organizations."

The Labor Council report went on to propose the following planks regarding taxation. It called for the following measures to be taken immediately:

"a) Obama must reverse the tax cuts for the rich -- immediately upon taking office. There is no justification for giving public money to the rich. Instead the highest income earners and the corporations should be taxed at a much higher rate.

"b) The new administration must retroactively tax Windfall Revenue on the oil-energy industry, on executive compensation and on corporate foreign retained earnings.

"c) The new administration must roll back capital income taxation to 1981. Capital gains, dividends, interest and rent income taxation and inheritance taxes have been, according to Jack Rasmus, PhD, the central factor responsible for the radical shifting of wealth to the top 1% of tax paying households, or 1.1 million households. This 1% now own 20% of the IRS reported income, equivalent to what the 1% held in 1928, and this shift, according to two economists at UC Berkeley, is heavily responsible for the runaway speculative investment that contributed to the current crisis.

"d) The new administration must repatriate an estimated $2 trillion from 27 offshore tax havens. The German government has moved on its wealthy investors diverting income to avoid taxation. The U.S. government must do the same."

Now is the time for labor to mobilize its members and community allies in support of these basic demands in defense of working people!

THE ORGANIZER NEWSPAPER

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Let's get those Depression numbers up to get into ecostroika faster!

Good news from the New York Times on January 26, 2009:

62,000 Jobs Are Cut by U.S. and Foreign Companies

By JACK HEALY

In the United States, companies including Caterpillar, Sprint Nextel, and Home Depot announced that they would slash a total of 45,000 jobs.

nytimes.com

Luxury Hotels Are Feeling Economy's Pinch

By JOE SHARKEY

Occupancy rates at luxury hotels are down more than 24 percent.

nytimes.com

Whining protects the system. "Don't blame our precious system!"

Road to Ruin: Twenty-Five People at the Heart of the Meltdown
Julia Finch, Andrew Clark and David Teather, The Guardian UK: "The worst economic turmoil since the Great Depression is not a natural phenomenon but a man-made disaster in which we all played a part. Guardian City editor Julia Finch picks out the individuals who have led us into the current crisis."

guardian.co.uk

Further reading:

Richard 'Ecocity' Register:
ecocitybuilders.org