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Labor and People's Unity and Grass Roots Action Key in 2010

Report to National Committee 1/9/10

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One year ago standing among the diverse, beautiful million-plus outpouring in the nation's capitol to witness the inauguration of President Barack Obama, the air was filled with both anticipation and worry. Anticipation for a new direction that the labor and people's outpouring, so key to the election result, represented. Worry for the presence of the ultra-right / corporate stronghold on government with three decades of rubble left behind, and their ruthless use of racism and fear to create divisions and maintain control.

As Sam Webb discusses in his article "Observations One Year In," perhaps that worry was not strong enough and perhaps the understanding of the fundamental role of labor and the core forces to social progress was not sufficiently grasped. But lessons are being learned as a result of the experiences in 2009.

The consolidation and transformation is still underway, from an election outpouring of labor, African American, Latino, Asian Pacific and all racially oppressed, women and youth -- the core forces -- into a post-election united organizing force that can win relief from the economic crisis and accomplish adoption of a bigger people's agenda.

Every attempt and effort has been employed by the corporate right-wing Republicans and extremist media, with no expense spared, to split apart the people's alliance and peel off Obama's supporters through division, anger and frustration.

They are utilizing obstructionist tactics and filibuster inside Congress to block legislation, calculating that voters will blame Democrats for gridlock.

Their goal is to take back the House and Senate in 2010 and take back the White House in 2012.

Despite Republican tactics the Lilly Ledbetter Equal Pay Act, the Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Hate Crimes Prevention Act, Helping Families Save Their Homes Act were all signed into law this year, Hilda Solis was confirmed as Labor Secretary, Eric Holder was confirmed as Attorney General and Sonia Sotomayor was confirmed to serve on the US Supreme Court as well as many other positive appointments at all levels of the judiciary and agencies like Labor and HUD.

However, a popular frustration with the pace of change is evident in some quarters. In part, it arises from the depth of the economic crisis and the desperate conditions that millions are facing..

This frustration reflects reliance on, and high expectations from Democratic Party control of the White

House and a majority in Congress. But pro-worker change cannot be expected to emanate simply from the White House and Congress. It will take big, bold actions from the grass roots, from labor and community, to carry the momentum for challenging the banks and corporations and creating the climate for such legislation to make its way through Congress to the President's desk for signing.

The frustration also reflects an underestimation of the ultra-right, of the catastrophic damage from Bush policies, and what would be entailed to stop and reverse that destruction. The most reactionary sectors, acting through the Republican Party in Congress and their massive right-wing propaganda machine have cynically created a phony populism and widespread mis-perception that the Obama administration is primarily responsible for the policies that favor Wall St. In fact, while the administration has not challenged the domination of economic policy by finance capital, it is the Republicans who have blocked even modest efforts at meaningful reform and are blocking more significant measures to meet peoples needs including health care.

What has slowed down change?. With vicious purpose, every Republican has voted on Party lines against every progressive measure including against health care reform. Not one Republican voted for the stimulus package that was passed.

The Democrats, on the other hand, represent a wide political spectrum.

58 of the Democrats in the House were elected from traditionally Republican districts that McCain carried. These were hard fought seats and part of the broad alliance to defeat the extreme right-wing. Many of these Democrats voted with Republicans on key legislation.

The 81 Democrats who are members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus joined with the Black, Hispanic and Asian American Pacific Caucuses to form the Quad Caucus, which has served as a strong force to enact, strengthen and improve the Obama agenda.

The biggest challenge is in the Senate, where 60 votes are needed to prevent a filibuster. The Democratic caucus has exactly 60 members including conservative independent Joe Lieberman who, along with several conservative Democrats, supported Republican filibusters, creating a log jam to slow down or block passage of any legislation especially health care.

Progress could not have been made this year without the mobilizations that took place demanding relief, organized in large part by the labor movement and Organizing for America. But the mobilizations were not large enough. They were not on the scale of the groundswell in 2008.

Historically, the labor and people's movement and it's unity role is at the heart of all progressive change. As Communists, our biggest contribution to the 2010 elections, and to the forward motion of our country, is building unity and mass action at the grass roots, based in labor and core forces, to address the crisis, collectively improve living and working conditions, and expand the electorate. The biggest challenge now is to find the forms by which the anger and frustration can be organized and mobilized around progressive demands.

Within the broad, multi-class alliance against the right-wing, a strong pro-labor grass roots movement is needed to project a people's agenda and counter the dangerous and demagogic populism from the

ultra-right. The people's agenda would include a program to create millions of good green jobs along with health care, housing, education, immigrant rights, peace and climate change.

Republican hopes are to block any major legislative reform and keep opinion turned against Congress. If they are successful, their chances at retaking majority control are considered good. With extremists in control, the backlash for working people and for the Obama administration would be grim.

The defeat of Democratic Governors in New Jersey and Virginia is a big warning sign. In both cases, with different specifics, there was a lack of mobilization and a subsequent lack of turnout especially in heavily Democratic and low income voting districts.

But Republican gains in the Congressional mid-term elections are not a given. In November's special election, Democrat Bill Owens won in New York's rock-rib Republican 23rd CD after an extremist Republican backed by Sarah Palin pushed out a more moderate Republican candidate.

The goal must be to defy historical precedent in which the party of the President loses seats in the mid-term election. Losses will make it that much harder to push through the agenda for change that Obama campaigned on. The "Yes We Can" slogan and outlook must be raised up. We must argue that in these perilous times, voters can be convinced to vote their basic class interests as they did in 2008 to defeat the corporate-right-wing Republicans. Building the grass roots mass movements to push for jobs and immediate relief will be a basic contribution to this unity and to engaging new voters and expanding the electorate.

With such an approach, it is possible to project increasing the number of progressive and pro-labor members of Congress in 2010, protect progressive incumbents, and increase the Democratic majority.

Key Races

All 435 House seats and a third of the 100 Senate seats -- 16 Democrats and 19 Republicans -- are up for election on November 2. The Democratic caucus in the Senate is 60 to 40. The Democratic majority in the House of Representatives is 257 to 178.

Many of the top competitive races in 2010 are in states and cities where we have organization, and can make a concrete difference. This is where our focus should be. This report is based on the National Journal and other lists of competitive races along with the responses we have received so far from districts. It will be added to and modified with new information and developments.

In addition to Congress, there are 36 Governors plus the State Legislatures up for election. The significance is magnified by the fact that this is a census year when redistricting will take place, and by the enormity of state budget deficits in the economic crisis.

The year starts out with the Illinois primary on Feb 2, and the exciting campaign by Rudy Lozano, Jr. for a seat in the state legislature. This is an extraordinary campaign, that is attracting national attention because of the candidate and because of the real possibility to defeat the entrenched Democratic machine.

It follows on the remarkable campaign by Rick Nagin for city council in Cleveland, Ohio, which brought together a broad multi-racial labor-community coalition that continues to function today.

There are similar campaigns for State Legislature in California and Missouri.

The Working Families Party continues to expand independent electoral politics. Working Family candidates will be on the ballot for State Legislature in New York, Connecticut, Delaware, Oregon and South Carolina usually using fusion to run on more than one line. Working Families just formed in Vermont. The Progressive Party in Vermont is fielding candidates for state officers.

The national focus in 2010 is on Congress. In such a hotly contested election year, every open seat is significant. Open seats provide either an opportunity to make gains, or a challenge to hold on.. A couple of additional Democratic seats in the Senate could undermine the filibuster tactic being used by Republicans..The Republicans are spending huge sums to go after every open Senate seat, including Sen. Kennedy's seat in Massachusetts.

At least 11 incumbent Senators are not seeking re-election. Seven are Republicans, and five are in states where we are organized - MO (Bond-R), OH (Voinovich-R), FL (Martinez-R), IL (Burris-D), CT (Dodd-D)

In the House at least 10 Democrats and 12 Republicans are not seeking re-election. Some are retiring, most are running for Governor or Senate including Kendrick Meek in Florida.. Seven are in areas where we are organized - Democratic: FL-17(Meek), PA-7 (Sestak primary for Senate against Specter), WA-3 (Baird retiring); Republican: FL-12 (Putnam), IL-10 (Kirk running for Senate, Dan Seals and Julie Hamos primary), MI-2 (Hoekstra retiring), MO-7 (Blunt running for Senate).

Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and California, the state with the largest Congressional delegation, have top competitive races at every level - for Governor, U S Senate and U S House. New York, Florida, Maryland and Connecticut have multiple key races. There is at least one key race in virtually every state where we have organization.

Holding on to Democratic seats in order to keep the majority is an important goal, including recently won seats in Republican districts. But there is also the goal of improving on the pro-labor content of the House and Senate. There are some progressive candidates challenging conservative Democrats in the primaries. Peace candidate Marcy Winograd is challenging Jane Harman in California's 17th CD on a program of green job creation. In the U.S. Senate Democratic primaries in IL and PA funding the war in Afghanistan has become a campaign issue. On a case by case basis, we should encourage labor and progressive primary candidates while taking caution not to close doors for the general election depending on the outcome of the primary.

The priority races from the 14 districts that have responded to date are included in the table at the end of the report. Links are included to the election calendar by state and by month, and to the member lists of the Quad Congressional caucuses and the Blue Dog Coalition.

Legislative Struggles

The inspiration and urgency that created the groundswell for Obama's election can hopefully be ignited in response to the dire situation working people and young people find themselves in. [The five point jobs program](#) of the AFL-CIO and Jobs for America Now must be brought to life with mobilizations, actions, outreach and education against the fear tactics of the extreme right-wing.

The ultra-right has relied on big lies to create confusion. One is that government should not have a role in guaranteeing a good quality of life for everyone.

That argument is paired with the idea that government programs for people's needs are responsible for a growing deficit. This is especially demagogic as it was during the Bush administration that the deficit exploded with huge cuts in taxes for the rich and an escalating military budget.

Health Care

The first target in the health care battle were seniors who were told that government "death panels" would decide if they could get care.. It took the labor movement retirees organizations to set the record straight that Medicare is in fact a government program and expansion would benefit everyone.

Women were targeted with the attempt to turn back the clock on abortion rights through the health care bill, as a way to splinter the coalition and block the legislation. Some within the faith based community stepped forward and rejected these litmus tests..

The bill being crafted now by Congressional leadership is expected to come out for vote by the end of the month. The fight for the best possible bill, drawing from the House version to address big problems in the Senate version, continues as we meet. Wednesday, January 13 is a national call-in day to Congress. The AFL-CIO message is for health care reform that: does not tax workers' health care benefits; requires employers to pay their fair share; controls health care costs and the best way to do that is by creating a public health care insurance plan option. Messages are also being sent to Congress to protect women's reproductive rights and end waiting limits for immigrants, and the right of states to carry out a public option.

While there is debate over the benefit of a weak bill, the fact that over 30 million people will get coverage cannot be dismissed. Passage will constitute a setback for the corporate ultra-right who do not want any bill, and will also create a more favorable terrain for the 2010 elections. The fight for health care as a basic human right including single payer and a national health service continues and builds on the work of this year.

Jobs and EFCA

Before adjournment in December, the Jobs for Main Street Act passed the House 216-212. The struggle for good, green job creation including public works jobs targeted to neighborhoods in greatest need, is moving onto center stage. Beyond job creation is the need for an economy that is restructured in the interests of working people.

The urgency for jobs is underscored by growing poverty. Six million people -- one out of every 50 -- lives in a household with no income except food stamps. They are among the half of the unemployed who do not receive unemployment benefits.

Extension of unemployment benefits, a targeted second stimulus and direct government green jobs creation is the program of the national coalition of labor, civil rights, faith based and environmental organizations which is launching a grass roots organizing campaign.

Mobilization at the grass roots around the demand for jobs can build unity and support for government job creation and for expansion of workers' rights including the right to form a union and passage of the Employee Free Choice Act..

Our main pre-convention discussion document, "No easy road to the future -- but we'll get there" by Sam Webb includes a section "Jobs and Immediate Relief" that lends itself to a nationally coordinated campaign at the district and club level to strengthen our ties with the multi-racial, multi-national working class, and join with labor and core forces to help organize the victims of the crisis and register and involve young people and other new voters.

[*Link to list of organization in the [Jobs for America Now](#) coalition*]

Immigration reform

Immigrant rights organizations have pressed for reform since the election of President Obama. There is organized pressure for immigration reform to be taken up in Congress by March before the heat of election season. Mass lobbying campaigns are already underway around HR 4321 the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security And Prosperity (CIR ASAP) introduced by Rep. Solomon Ortiz with 92 co-sponsors including the entire Congressional Hispanic Caucus.. Labor and many leading immigrant groups are in support. A Senate version of the bill is expected to be introduced this month which probably will be more restrictive. If complete reform does not get passed, it is possible that some elements to relieve the situation of the 12 million without documents will be acted on. There is growing recognition that naturalized immigrants and the children of immigrants are voting in large numbers and can make the difference in key races. We have updated our Immigrant Rights principles and factsheet. It will be posted in English and Spanish on the CPUSA website by the end of January.

[*Link to HR 4321: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d111:HR04321:@@P>]*

Military budget

Funding to escalate the number of troops to Afghanistan is meeting opposition within Congress.. In December, a group of 12 co-sponsors including five Republicans, signed onto Rep Dennis Kucinich's Privileged Resolution to End the Afghan War. The resolution links the needs of 15 million unemployed to the fact that "the country cannot continue spending hundreds of billions of dollars on disastrous wars." The Jobs not War theme provides the basis for expanding public opposition to increased troop levels and to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while at the same time mobilizing in favor of immediate job creation..Congressional hearings are anticipated in February and March to

discuss the impact of military spending on jobs creation and other domestic needs, linking to the need for a green jobs, demilitarized economy. Allocations for the military budget, including nuclear weapons, are now up to 55% of all discretionary spending. In some states, with the help of National Priorities Project, initiatives are being taken to call for cuts in war spending as a vehicle to fund state programs for human needs and services being eliminated due to state budget shortfalls.

[Co-sponsors of Rep Dennis Kucinich's End the Afghan War resolution: Reps John Conyers, Jr.; (D-MI); Ron E. Paul (R-TX); Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD); Bob Filner (D-CA); Walter Jones, Jr. (R-NC); Lynn Woolsey (D-CA); Edward Whitfield (R-KY); Michael Capuano (D-MA); Timothy V. Johnson (R-IL); Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ); Eric Massa (D-NY); and Alan Grayson (D-FL).]

Street Heat

The people have a big agenda for health care, jobs and union rights, immigration reform and ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It will take the independent grass roots "street heat" of the people to push this agenda through in the face of the Republican's pro-corporate stonewall strategy.

Role of the Party

Our Party can make a significant contribution to the ongoing process of turning our country around by participating with and helping to build the independent role of labor and core forces for a pro-worker agenda in 2010..

We can make a lasting contribution by sinking our roots into election districts and neighborhoods with the labor movement in the struggle for job creation combined with voter registration and mobilization.

We can make a unique contribution with our own candidates for local office who are supported by or come out of independent labor and people's coalitions at the grass roots. These campaigns should be highlighted at our convention to encourage more such initiatives on a regular basis. Re-establish network of elected and appointed officials and candidates.

We can make a particular contribution by enlarging the readership of the People's World and by bringing new members into our ranks who are ready to fight for immediate relief and understand that the system of capitalism must be changed to achieve a fair, equal and peaceful society.

The frustration and anger in the country can go either way. Our Party is appreciated today for our mature and accurate assessment and strategic vision. We are drawing upon our historical strength in leading and mobilizing militant mass struggles. To the extent that we meet the challenge to turn our analysis into organizing the victims of the crisis and the broad labor and peoples alliance, we will make our best contribution to the 2010 elections and to building a lasting movement and larger Communist Party.

We should enter this important year with confidence in the multi-racial, multi-national working class and people, and with optimism that the possibilities for progress can be realized.

RESOURCES

- 1. Links**
- 2. Key Races and Open Seats**
- 3. Chart: Prioritized Races**

1. Links:

2010 Primary Elections by Month (FVAP 2010-11 Voting Assistance Guide)

2010 Primary Elections by State (FVAP)

<http://www.fvap.gov/resources/media/vaghandout3.pdf>

Congressional Progressive Caucus Member List (81)

[http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?](http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?ContentID=166&ParentID=0&SectionID=4&SectionTree=4&lnk=b&ItemID=164)

[ContentID=166&ParentID=0&SectionID=4&SectionTree=4&lnk=b&ItemID=164](http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov/index.cfm?ContentID=166&ParentID=0&SectionID=4&SectionTree=4&lnk=b&ItemID=164)

Congressional Black Caucus Member List (42)

http://thecongressionalblackcaucus.lee.house.gov/member_info.html

Congressional Hispanic Caucus Member List (24)

<http://velazquez.house.gov/chc/>

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus Member List (15)

http://honda.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=762&Itemid=318

Blue Dog Coalition Member List (58)

<http://www.house.gov/melancon/BlueDogs/Member%20Page.html>

2. Key Races and Open Seats:

US Senators Not Seeking Re-election

Democrats: Burris-IL, Kaufman-Del-D, Dorgan-ND, Dodd-CT

Republicans: Bond-MO, Brownback-KS, Bunning-KY, Martinez-FL, Gregg-NH, Voinovich-OH, Hutchinson-TX (?)

US Representatives Not Seeking Re-election

Democrats: Davis-AL-07 running for Gov., Meek-FL-17 running for Senate, Abernethy-HI-01 running for Gov, Moore-KS-03 (Blue Dog), Melancon-LA-03 running for Senate (Blue Dog), Hodes-NH-01 running for Senate, Sestak-PA-07 running for Senate, Gordon-TN-06 (Blue Dog), Tanner-TN-08 (Blue Dog), Baird-WA-03)

Republicans: Castle-DE-AL running for Senate, Putnam-FL-12, Deal-GA-09 running for Gov, Kirk-IL-10 running for Senate, Moran-KS-01 running for Senate, Tiahrt-KS-04 running for Senate, Hoekstra-MI-02, Blunt-MO-07 running for Senate, Fallin-OK-05 running for Gov, Gerlach-PA-06

running for Gov, Barrett-SC-03 running for Gov, Wamp-TN-03) running for Gov., Radonovich-CA-19

3. Chart: Prioritized Races -- Partial (based on responses received to date)

Key -

* = top competitive race

CAPS = Progressive Dem Primary

State	Senate	House	Gov	St Leg	Ballot Initiative
CA	Boxer (D)*	Lungren (R-3)- Ami Bera Harman(D-36)- WINOGRAD	Open (R)*	65th Assem.	- Budget - Amend Prop 13
CT	Open (Dodd D)*	Murphy (D-5) Himes (D-4)	Open (R)	WFP	
IL	Open (Burris D)*	Open (R Kirk 10)* primary Lipinski (D-3) - MUJICA	Quinn (D)*	23rd Rep	
MD	Mikulski (D)	Edwards (D-4) Kratovil (D-1)*	O'Malley (D)		
MI		Peters (D-9) Schauer (D-7)	Open (D)	keep House gain Senate	
MO	Open (Bond R)*			59th Rep	-right to work -anti-affirm, action
NJ		Adler (D-3)			
NM		Teague (D-2)*			
NY	Gillibrand (D)	Owens (D-23)*	Patterson (D)*		
OH	Open (VoinavichR)*	Kilroy (D-15)	Strickland(D)*		
OR	Wyden (D)*		Open (D)		
PA	Specter (D)*	Open (Sestak D-7)* Altmire (D-4) - BERNER?	Open (Rendell D)*		
TX			Perry (R) - primary		
VA		Perriello (D-5)* Nye (D-2) -			

