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Honoring Ohio's unsung heroes of 2008 elections

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Diane Archer
Former Ohio AFL-CIO President Dill Burga (right) accepts an award for current president Joe Rugola from PWW reporter and steelworker retiree Bruce Bostick.

Speaking to scores of activists in labor, community, farm, retiree and other progressive movements at events in three Ohio cities, Sam Webb, national chairman of the Communist Party USA, called for all out grassroots efforts to realize the potential for progressive change brought about by the November elections.

The events in Cleveland, Columbus and Ashtabula were sponsored by the People's Weekly World newspaper. In Cleveland and Columbus the paper presented Distinguished Service Awards to Unsung Heroes of the November Elections including Joe Rugola, president of the Ohio AFL-CIO, Harriet Applegate, executive secretary of the North Shore (Cleveland area) AFL-CIO, Mary Keith, president of Ohio ACORN, and Barbara Clark, president of Columbus ACORN.



Mary Keith (left) and Harriet Applegate with the Distinguished Service Award plaques they received from the People's Weekly World.

The honorees were chosen, Ohio PWW Correspondent Rick Nagin said, because of the critical but generally unrecognized role of organized labor and grassroots voter registration efforts in winning Ohio for Barack Obama. The labor movement, through its massive outreach to members, retirees, their families and affiliated groups, he said,

accounted for 40 percent of Obama's votes in Ohio, while ACORN was responsible for registering 250,000 of the new voters in the election, which Obama won by a margin of 220,000.

In his speeches, Webb said Obama "is more than a friend to working people. He is a people's advocate" and said the election brought "joy and relief" to Americans and people throughout the world who are celebrating "the end of 30 years of right-wing extremism."

He said Obama's achievements in just the first weeks of office were astounding including orders to close Guantanamo and end policies of torture, the signing of the Lilly Ledbetter bill to allow workers to recover damages for job discrimination, the rescinding of anti-labor rules enacted by the Bush administration, the setting of new car emission standards, the expansion of children's health coverage and the economic stimulus package.

"We must rally around the good decisions," Webb said, noting that much more was needed for economic recovery and that the crisis actually calls for fundamental restructuring of the capitalist economy. This means serious consideration must be given to such things as nationalization of the energy complex and the financial corporations and national health care.

Immediate action, he said, is needed to get the initial stimulus package passed in Congress. Approval of the nomination of Rep. Hilda Solis as labor secretary is "the opening gun in the fight for the Employee Free Choice Act," which would allow workers to organize unions without fear of employer retaliation.

Immediate action is also needed, he said, to stem the epidemic of home foreclosures. Webb hailed the call by Ohio Rep. Marcy Kaptur that people facing foreclosure should squat in their homes and "get a good lawyer," since the "slicing and dicing" of mortgages "in outrageous Ponzi schemes" makes it impossible in many cases to determine who the actual mortgage holder is.

Webb also urged immediate action to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Continuation of these wars," he said, "would derail everything Obama is trying to achieve, just as the Vietnam War derailed the War on Poverty and the Great Society social programs of President

Lyndon Johnson."

The full text of Webb's speech in Cleveland is available at www.cpusa.org.

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