

Why Campaigning for Democrats Cripples Labor Unions

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As labor leaders across the U.S. shift resources away from defending workers and into Obama's re-election campaign, millions of organized and non-organized workers remain unemployed and hopeless. Contrary to the "optimistic" government jobs numbers, the jobs crisis grinds onward. Some labor leaders will argue that getting Obama elected is the first step towards addressing the jobs crisis, but they know better.

The recent so-called JOBS Act that passed with strong Democrat and Republican support will create zero jobs — the law's intent is to lower regulations for banks and corporations, in an attempt to boost their profits. The JOBS wording was used for popularity's sake, requiring heavy doses of deceit.

A similar-minded jobs project was put forth by Obama earlier in the year, when he appointed "experts" to his Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. But the Council was front loaded with CEO's and bankers, with only two labor reps, who allowed themselves to be used to obscure the real intent of the project. Richard Trumka, President of the labor federation AFL-CIO, was one of the token labor leaders on the council, who only later partially redeemed himself by denouncing the Council's job-creating recommendations (predictably, one of the key "job creating" ideas was to lower corporate tax rates).

Millions of union and non-union workers have seen their lives worsen under Obama while he promotes the above stunts that are intended to serve the wealthy and fool everybody else.

These millions of workers will now be subjugated to pro-Obama door knockers and phone callers from labor unions who will ignore the above facts while trying to put a pro-worker face on the pro-corporate president. Workers will not be so easily fooled, their paychecks — or lack thereof — speak stronger truths than can any pro-Obama campaigner.

The key irony is that the more forward-looking labor unions have already realized that they need the support of non-unionized workers if their movement is to survive. To this extent both union federations — AFL-CIO and Change to Win — have put tremendous resources towards community outreach and organizing. But such efforts can be wasted when unions pursue policies that working people not only disagree with, but denounce.

Non-unionized workers will only actively support labor unions when they are inspired to do so; if the non-union community trusts labor to fight for their interests, they will fight alongside unions in the streets. However, when unions have to skew the facts to encourage votes for Obama, they lose crucial trust with the broader community.

Trust was also lost when working people witnessed many unions publicly supporting Obama's health care plan, which forces millions of non-union workers to buy shoddy corporate health insurance they cannot afford. Labor's kid glove handling of Obama's anti-public education policy is also high on the list of examples where unions weakened their community status by attaching themselves to the Democrats' pro-corporate policies.

Shockingly, the largest teachers' union, National Education Association, has endorsed Obama's campaign even though the NEA President, Dennis Van Roekel, summarized teachers' experience with the Obama Administration by saying, "Today our members face the most anti-educator, anti-union, anti-student environment I have ever experienced" — an environment directly encouraged by Obama's deceitfully named "Race to the Top" education program.

Obama has yet to promise unions or working people anything in the upcoming election. Whoever wins the Presidency will immediately continue serving the corporations with varying degrees of public enthusiasm — the only real difference between the two parties.

Labor leaders are not stupid. They recognize these facts, but have absolutely no idea what to do about it. So they do what they've done for decades; align themselves with the Democrats in the hopes that they will be rewarded for their servitude. But the crumbs of gratitude stopped trickling down years ago, and what little remains on the workers plate is now being targeted by both Democratic and Republican politicians who insist on ever more concessions.

The Democrats' policies signify a clean break from labor unions, an alliance that was always at the indirect expense of the rest of the working class. As long as unions were treated fairly, many labor leaders turned a blind eye to policies that affected non-union workers, creating a suicidal distance between the organized and non-organized.

Now it's labor unions that are on the menu; Democratic governors on a state by state basis have wrenched major concessions from public sector unions, substantially weakening them and reducing their numbers. This, combined with mass unemployment and Race to the Top, amounts to a concerted anti-union agenda.

Labor leaders solution to this crisis is to raise money and volunteers...to elect Democrats.

Labor's real power will thus remain unused. The inherent power of unions lies in their numbers, organization, and ability to collectively assert themselves in the workplace and streets. This is how labor became strong; the mass strikes and street demonstrations that built the labor movement created an organizational power that neither Democrats nor Republicans dared touch. President Eisenhower and Nixon, for example, refused to confront unions for fear of the repercussions. Unions were not given this power by compassionate Democrats in past generations; power was forcibly taken from the Democrats.

This truth is kept concealed from the current generation of union members, many of whom are miseducated into believing that their power is limited to electing Democrats. No other belief is as dangerous for the labor movement, which would immediately benefit from defunding the Democrats and using the money to educate and organize their members to fight in the workplaces and streets for the many pro-worker demands, like a massive federal jobs program, that will otherwise remain "off the table" in Congress.

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http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/05/education/05teachers.html?_r=2

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