

Workers Rights in America: Card Check's Death

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Maybe you didn't hear the news: Card Check — the key provision of the Employee Free Choice Act — is dead. You might not have gotten the message because U.S. labor "leaders" are remarkably silent on the issue. Not a peep.

The media, however, has the story right: the Democrats are now officially seeking a compromise, one that strips the bill of its essence — the right for workers to start a union by stating their intention to do so.

So why are most union leaders so quiet? No one likes to talk about their blunders, especially the colossal type. The defeat of Card Check is a mighty blow to labor, and admitting that your strategy failed to achieve it may cause others to question your authority.

So the labor officials remain silent. They ignore the fact that they spent hundreds of millions of dollars in dues money to elect Democrats so that Card Check's passage would be assured; that they encouraged workers to make thousands of phone calls, knocking on countless doors to garner support for a supposedly Card Check-endorsing Obama; that once Obama was elected, most union "leaders" simply encouraged their members to act like lobbyists, and stay out of the streets. They also ignore history and the similar embarrassments that occurred under Clinton...and Carter, etc. They do the same thing over and over, achieving the same results — absolutely nothing.

The Democrats have massively betrayed the unions...again. And labor is doing nothing to hold them accountable for it — once again. The next elections that take place will likely showcase the union tops fear-mongering about what a Republican administration might do to American workers. And if you would like a preview to such a nightmare, simply imagine Obama's policies being replicated by the right wing; it can't get much worse.

Key to understanding the defeat of Card Check is understanding the nature of the Democratic Party. If one simply looks at the Democratic Leadership Committee, not to mention those who Obama has consciously surrounded himself with in his administration, you'll find a group of hardened corporate lackeys — no exaggeration required. Few of these people can point to even a remotely pro-labor record; and it is such people who have complete control of the Democratic Party.

If one is on the side of working people and does not recognize these truths, it can only mean willful political naivety or conscious treachery — neither characteristic should be found in a labor leader.

Another reason Card Check failed is that — once the Democrats swept Congress — labor

was totally inactive. Sure they flew to Washington and mimicked the corporate lobbyists' schmoozing with senators; but such actions can only accomplish so much.

Much more powerful of a statement are giant rallies, marches, mass civil disobedience, and if necessary, workplace strikes and picketing.

Even the corporate Democrats are not immune to such actions, nor are the Republicans. Although Card Check is currently dead, it can be resuscitated. And such a resurrection will not come from the good graces of the Democrats, but from a movement that physically forces their hand. The ruling elite in this country — represented by the two-party system — gives crumbs only when they're panicked or frightened.

Rather than change course from a mistaken strategy, some labor leaders are drawing incorrect conclusions from Card Check's defeat and thus laying the groundwork for future mistakes. For example, instead of pointing to the Democratic Party in general, specific anti-Card Check Democrats are being blamed for their public treachery, so that other Democrats — most importantly Obama — can remain "friends of labor." It should be noted that if Obama wanted Card Check to pass, it would have passed.

A popular president has incredible power within his party and thus tremendous influence over congressmen. One way this influence is exerted is via elections: Obama needed only to say to Senators: "Support Card Check or I'll support a different Democrat come election time and make sure you do not receive campaign funds from the Democratic Party," and the vote is secured. Another ace Obama has is his veto power: he can tell Democrats "I'll veto a different bill you're sponsoring if you don't support Card Check," etc. Instead of doing this, Obama remained nearly mute on the Card Check debate, an action correctly interpreted by Democrats to mean he was against it, freeing their hands to act as the corporate lobbyists demanded.

Another way labor leaders are denying the realities of the Card Check defeat is by promoting the "progressive provisions" that supposedly remain in the bill. Forget the meal, they'd rather focus on the crumbs. If such a bill were to pass, those in labor lauding it a success will be recognized as the most desperate to maintain the rotten relationship between the Democrats and the unions.

Card Check's failure is not the end of the world if lessons are learned from it. A whole new approach is desperately needed. The unions cannot put their support in a party that repeatedly sells them out and that does nothing about health care while banks are bailed out and new wars are started. None of these policies benefit working people, quite the opposite.

The unions cannot sway politicians by outspending the corporations and super wealthy (since they own the banks). Labor does, however, have adequate resources to forge a politically independent path, the very existence of which would inspire millions of others to walk with us. This option would mean that the labor officials use their considerable resources to begin to organize a political party that would be specifically aimed at defending the interests of working people. But this cannot be done until the current situation is fully recognized. Labor's power is still backsliding. Admitting the current failures and learning from them is the first step towards turning the tide, and walking independently.

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