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Labor and Democracy: Why is ALEC attacking labor?

By Scott Marshall

Have you met ALEC yet? ALEC is the American Legislative Exchange Council. Basically it is one of the main ways big business drafts legislation for its “friends” in state legislatures to pass. ALEC’s private sector board of directors reads like the “Who’s Who” of big business. If you really want to get to know ALEC, read the American Association for Justice’s report here.

ALEC operates as “the ultimate smoke-filled back room,” to quote the report. ALEC is a key way that rightwing corporate interests buy and influence state legislators. Outfits like the notorious Koch brothers, and others like big oil, big finance, big pharmaceutical and big tobacco pay for ALEC meetings and conferences, where they present arguments and model legislation to friendly (bought and paid for) state lawmakers. These conferences most often include lavish accommodations, the best food and drink and expensive golf outings.

Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO president, spoke about ALEC and the Koch brothers in his recent Press Club address. He spoke of them as threats to worker’s rights and democracy. He pointed to their roles in developing the ongoing attack on public workers.

In 2009, 862 ALEC-crafted bills were introduced in state legislatures across the country and 115 of them were adopted. ALEC has long been the incubator of legislation to try and discredit cli-

mate change science for big oil. Behind the scenes, ALEC also helped lead the corporate push to poo-poo the cancer-causing effects of tobacco products. For the big banks it came up with schemes to force seniors to accept reverse mortgages in order to qualify for Medicaid.

They also develop legislation to suppress voter registration and turn out anti-immigration legislation, anti-gay marriage legislation, anti women’s health legislation and many other undemocratic measures. Big on their 2011 agenda is also state level attacks on federal health care reform.

ALEC’s work is basically an all out assault on democracy. Yes, almost all of their proposals work



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to fatten their corporate sponsors’ bottom lines. But ALEC’s model legislation is about power.

With what companies lose in lost production, sales and profits, many strikes cost them more

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than they would have had to pay if they had just agreed to union negotiating proposals. Some of the fiercest corporate resistance has to do with work rules and union rights. Many non-union companies are willing to pay wages and accept working conditions that match union contracts just to avoid worker's organization.

Public workers in Wisconsin were willing to meet Gov. Scott Walker's demands on pensions and healthcare costs. That was not really the point for the Governor and the Republican legislature. More important for them was an end to the right to collectively bargain - that is, a voice on the job.

Why? Because giant corporations fundamentally want dictatorial powers. They abhor the idea of employees having any, even a limited, voice on the job. But the corporate elite's undemocratic appetites go far beyond union workers. They can't abide any democratic resistance to their economic or political goals.

ALEC is mostly in the business of consolidating right-wing corporate political power. ALEC champions racist, anti-immigrant, anti-woman, anti-gay legislation because it serves to weaken working class unity. Unity is a central component

of working class resistance to attacks on democracy. ALEC focuses on budget and tax legislation not only to cut their own taxes, but also to disempower working people through economic crisis and poverty. ALEC would "shrink government to the size that can be drowned in a bathtub."

So why the target on unions? Unions are basic organizations of the working class. Unions have resources and effective organized people power beyond their size. They have organization in every big city and in most towns including in many rural areas. Unions are one of the most inclusive and diverse organizations of the working class - in membership and leadership.

And, very importantly, organized labor has increasingly focused on being a voice for all of the working class - multinational, multiracial, male and female, young and old, gay and straight, middle class and poor, union and non-union. Labor is critical in building the biggest, broadest possible people's coalition that can actually resist and reverse corporate America's grab for power and profits before people.



Scott Marshall is CPUSA Labor Secretary.

Move over Jim Crow, for the Wisc. GOP

By PW Editorial Board

Jim Crow move over, the Wisconsin Republicans have taken your place," said state Sen. Bob Jauch, a Democrat from Poplar, Wis., comparing his state's new voter ID law to segregationist policies.

Voters will be required to show photo identification in recall elections seeking to unseat several Republican legislators who pushed through Gov. Scott Walker's anti-union bill. Voters will be asked to show drivers' licenses, state IDs, passports, military IDs, naturalization papers or tribal IDs. College IDs will not be accepted.

"Hundreds of thousands of people will stay home because of this legislation," said Sen. Jon Erpenbach, D-Milwaukee.

Further, the Republican-run state election board is in charge of running a public education campaign about the new law and the Republican-run legislature has not allocated any funds for the campaign. Republicans are expected next to oppose even the issuing of free state ID cards.

Scarier still, these Jim Crow voter ID laws are in the works now in at least 22 states.

Segregationists, like the Republicans today,

also argued that what they were doing was preserving the "integrity" of the vote and protecting us from "fraud."

Polls show that most disapprove of the GOP's vision for America. People want to preserve Social Security and Medicare, they want the rich to pay a fair share of the taxes, they want to end subsidies to big oil companies, they want the right to form unions at their workplaces and they generally approve of the job being done by the nation's first African American president. The response from the GOP is to cut millions of those Americans - Africans Americans, seniors, immigrants, youth and students - off the voting rolls under the guise of protecting us from "voter fraud."

Democracy goes out the window when Republicans are put in control of a state.

These laws make it clearer than ever the real fraud: Republican lawmakers pontificating about democracy while wrecking it. They have shown clearly that they will not act in the interest of the people and that they cannot be trusted to take care of anything as sacred as our democratic rights and freedoms.

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Trumka: If you're not supporting us, we won't support you

By John Wojcik

In a major speech at the National Press Club May 20, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said he supports unions taking an independent political approach in their fight to build the power of workers.

"Working people want a labor movement strong enough to restore balance to our economy, fairness to our tax system, security to our families and moral standing to our nation," Trumka told the live audience here and tens of thousands of viewers on C-Span and other media outlets. "Our role is not to build the political power of a party or a candidate. It is to improve the lives of working families."

"It doesn't matter if candidates and parties are controlling the wrecking ball or simply standing aside - the outcome is the same either way," said Trumka. "If leaders aren't blocking the wrecking ball and advancing working families' interests, working people will not support them. This is where our focus will be - now, in 2012 and beyond."

The leader of the nation's largest labor federation said that an independent labor movement was critical now because of attacks on workers' rights, new efforts to curtail voting rights and calls for austerity on the backs of seniors, children and the sick.

He said that politicians like Republican Govs. John Kasich (Ohio) and Scott Walker (Wisconsin) campaigned promising to take action on the nation's jobs crisis, only to show when they took office that "their jobs agenda was to make them disappear." He added, "But their real passion was for eliminating the rights of working people and their unions because they are the people standing in the way of their agenda."

Trumka cited Alex Hanna, a graduate assistant and co-president of the Teaching Assistants' Association.



Hanna, whose family is from Egypt, was in Cairo when he heard about Gov. Walker's push to end collective bargaining for public workers. He rushed home to join the demonstrations.

Hanna said the Cairo and Madison experiences, though different, show that "when people overcome their fears and stand for what they believe in they can succeed."

Trumka warned that "powerful political forces are trying to silence working people." He said, "In this environment we must do more than just protect our own right to a voice in the life of our nation. We must raise our voice to win a better future for all working families here in America and around the globe."

The union leader called for unity.

"Our unions must reach out to every working person in America - to those whose jobs have been outsourced and down-sized, to carwash workers in Los Angeles, to domestic workers who have few legal rights, to freelancers and young people who have 'gigs' rather than jobs. And together with the AFL-CIO's construction and manufacturing workers, pilots and painters, plumbers and public employees, bakers and others, we will be heard."

Working people want a labor movement strong enough to restore balance to our economy.

Baltimore push for funding

By Margaret Baldridge

My name is _____ and I am Baltimore” was the opening statement of a dozen young people who went on to tell their personal stories at the annual “City Council Tax Payers’ Night” at Baltimore’s War Memorial Building May 18.

The youth were united in a call for restoration of 4,000 summer jobs that the proposed budget cuts from the 9,000 summer jobs in 2009.

The testimonies of the youth as well as the statements on their shirts - “It’s about opportunity” or “I was born to thrive” (on the front) “so don’t arrest me” (on the back) - point to the seriousness of the reversed priorities of underfunded youth programs and overfunded youth criminalization projects in Baltimore. The proposed budget, for example, calls for a \$1.5 million decrease in recreation centers and a \$4.5 million increase in crime investigation. A flier distributed at the rally announced a May 25 “Anti-Jail Alliance Community Meeting” to stop the construction of a \$100 million facility “on a new adult facility to house youth pre-trial.”

A second major theme of Tax Payers’ Night was related to the first: the spending of taxpayer dollars to fund wars abroad instead of needed social programs at home. The same City Council that was hearing the grievances of Baltimore citizens was also congratulated for passing a resolution this past May 16 “calling on Congress to redirect military spending to domestic priorities.”

Other suggestions on how to fund needed social programs were offered. Tom Chalkley said, “You are sitting up there asking, ‘Where is the money coming from?’ But I ask you: How many corporations pay their fair share of taxes to our city? I challenge you to fund a study to see how much of a shortfall Baltimore City is suffering because corporations aren’t paying their fair share.”

Barco de la marina llevará el nombre de César Chávez

Por Pepe Lozano

Se espera que esta semana en San Diego, California la Marina [Navy] de EEUU va nombrar un nuevo barco carguero por el líder sindical y activista pro derechos civiles, César Chávez. Pero la noticia ha provocado controversia.

Se espera que el Secretario de la Marina, Ray Mabus, vaya hacer oficial el anuncio este miércoles, 18 de mayo, en una ceremonia en las facilidades de General Dynamics NASSCO en San Diego, en donde el barco está bajo construcción.

Nació Chávez in Yuma, Arizona, en 1927. Se hizo activista en el Valle Central de California, luchando por los derechos de los campesinos. Fundaba lo que más tarde se conocía como la UFW [United Farm Workers] en 1962, sindicato laboral que organizaba y luchaba por los acuerdos colectivos y condiciones laborales seguras para los campesinos.

Chávez se conoce ampliamente por su uso de tácticas no violentas, y se destacaba en la lucha nacional por los derechos civiles y contra la discriminación generalizada.

Marc Grossman, con la Fundación César Chávez y asistente a Chávez durante su vida declaró a Fox News Latino que Chávez era un hombre humilde que nunca hubiera buscado la atención por sí mismo.

“Nunca quiso ser reconocido por los honores porque sabía que eran muchos César Chávez: los campesinos desconocidos que tanto sacrificaban y tanto lograban,” dijo. “Es por eso que hoy la familia Chávez reconoce este honor en nombre de todos los Latinos que han construido este país y han servido a su patria en las fuerzas ar-

madass”.

La decisión de nombrar el barco por Chávez provocó duras críticas por parte del congresista conservador republicano Duncan Hunter, que representa a partes del Condado de San Diego.

La Senadora Barbara Boxer, Demócrata por California, dijo que aplaude Mabus por nombrar el barco por Chávez porque trabajaba sin descanso para promover justas condiciones laborales e igualdad de derechos para todos.

Rossana Cambrón, activista por la paz en Los Angeles cuyo hijo está por comenzar su tercer término de servicio con el Ejército de EEUU, dijo que manda un mensaje equivocado.

“Quisiera no más que pudieran honrarle a Chávez de otra manera,” dijo ella. “Se siente que se está revolcando su herencia. No está bien cuando aprenden los niños de las enseñanzas no violentas de Chávez, y luego se dan cuenta que hay un barco militar nombrado por él. Si el gobierno y los militares dirían que pondrían fin a las guerras en Irak y Afganistán en el nombre de César Chávez y el Reverendo Martin Luther King Jr, pues eso sería muy apto”.

Randy Shaw, de San Francisco, es autor del libro “Más allá de los campos: César Chávez, la UFW y la lucha por la justicia en el siglo XXI,” publicado en 2008. El también cuestiona la decisión de la Marina. “Se trata de un creyente en la no violencia: Su creencia más central fue la de la no violencia,” dijo Shaw a CNN. “Crees que el hubiera querido ver un barco militar llevando su nombre? Parece muy poco probable”.

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