



The Western Kentucky Worker



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Requiem for the American Worker

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Since the November elections attacks on public employees and their unions have exploded. Everywhere you turn you read of attacks on public sector workers, from teachers to janitors, firefighters to administrators. Wealthy right-wing corporations and their political pawns and media enablers have tried to make public employees into public enemies.

Even in union-dense states like California, Michigan, New York, New Jersey and Ohio, public employees and their unions are suddenly in the crosshairs of right-wingers hell-bent on starving state budgets along with public employees and their unions. Attacks on public employees and their unions are nothing new. For decades public employees have been scapegoats for right-wing government haters who have accused them of doing nothing while falsely claiming that they make considerably more money than their private sector counterparts.

To fully appreciate the significance of the present attack on public employee unions it must be considered in the context of the four decade war being waged by corporate America against the American labor movement. Over the past forty-plus years corporations and their political pawns have systematically attacked unions in each economic sector having significant density as well as political and economic power. In the late 1960s large corporations, working in concert, decided the time was right to wage a serious, well-organized and well-financed war on the American labor movement. The era of cooperation, conciliation and collective bargaining of the 1940s, 1950s and part of the 1960s was tossed on the proverbial ash heap of history.

We can look back and see the carnage that the corporate war on workers and their unions has wrought: a decline in wages, benefits, unions and jobs--while corporations and the wealthiest one-percent have amassed the largest concentrations of wealth in history.

It may come as a surprise to many that the current assault on public employee unions has its roots in the late 1960s when a deliberate, well-organized and financed

effort by 200 of America's largest corporations to destroy the building trades unions got underway. With the organization of the Construction Users' Anti-Inflation Roundtable, chaired by U.S. Steel's Roger Blough, the largest U.S. industrial corporations dependent upon the skilled union trades organized around the desire to have their projects built and maintained without having to pay union wages and benefits. The "Roundtable" commissioned a series of studies designed to provide cover for their efforts to undermine the building trades unions and began giving unwarranted competitive advantages to nonunion contractors.

This original "Roundtable" later merged with another corporate backed anti-labor organization known as the Labor Law Study Committee to form the Business Roundtable. Of the many schemes hatched by the Business Roundtable was the conspiracy to award billions of dollars of industrial construction work to the largest nonunion contractors in the nation. To make this a reality they helped establish the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) as the counterpoint to the well organized labor/management committees among the union sector of the construction industry. The ABC became the mechanism for challenging the supremacy of union construction in every market in the nation and one of the most vehemently anti-union organizations in the nation.

In May 1979, J.C. Turner, President of the International Union of Operating Engineers, made the following observations:

"It has become apparent that a systematic and well planned campaign is being conducted to totally destroy the building trades... the current attack is the result of a decade of planning and groundwork by the Business Roundtable acting in concert with regional and local construction user associations, the contractor associations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, pro-business academic institutions and their allies in government... Our real enemy is clearly these large industrial concerns, organized as the Business Roundtable, who are using the contractors and their associations as soldiers in the battle. Their purpose is to put the lid on costs by pressuring their construction contractors to slash wages... The Business Roundtable represents a threat not just to the building trades unions but to the trade union movement as a whole... If corporate America can weaken the hard-won gains of this country's construction unions, the ultimate target will be the entire trade union movement..."

Double-breasting, where union contractors establish so-called *alter ego* nonunion firms to compete with and undermine their own union companies became rampant. The federal government purposefully failed to enforce federal prevailing wage and workplace safety laws. Legal restrictions, such as repeal of *common situs* picketing further restricted building trades' efforts to maintain or expand market share and membership.

While the corporate assault on the building trades unions was in full swing, it gained a powerful ally when Ronald Reagan became President on January 20, 1981.

Following his election Reagan wasted no time and quickly met with the president of the ABC and signaled his strong support for the war on the building trades unions.

Reagan's alliance with the Business Roundtable and the ABC was certainly not his only contribution to union busting. On August 5, 1981, in the single most infamous act of anti-unionism in memory Reagan fired striking members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO).

PATCO was a good target for Reagan since PATCO was a "professional" organization and was not affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Lacking critical relationships necessary for support and solidarity in times of crisis it was unlikely that the rest of the labor movement would rise up and defend this small, professional, independent organization that may have made a grave tactical error by calling a prohibited work stoppage. PATCO had endorsed and supported Reagan in his campaign for president, adding to its outsider identity and alienation from the rest of the labor movement.

It is universally agreed that by firing and decertifying PATCO, Reagan signaled to employers that his administration would be complicit in the corporate war on workers and their unions. Reagan's actions were just the opposite of what FDR had accomplished for unions when he declared, "If I went to work in a factory the first thing I'd do is join a union." FDR, through his words, deeds and legislation did more to spur the growth of unions in America than any single political leader in history. Reagan's actions accomplished just the opposite and began an era of union busting in which high paid consultants used every legal and illegal trick in the books, with the assistance and cooperation of the Reagan NLRB and DOL, to harass unions and thwart organizing at every turn.

Reagan's action ushered in an era in which the use of permanent striker replacements became the norm, effectively nullifying labor's most powerful weapon – the strike. In disputes where workers engaged in work stoppages to pressure employers into negotiating reasonable terms and conditions, employers emboldened and encouraged by Reagan's treatment of PATCO, simply hired permanent striker replacements and eliminated the persuasive impact of work stoppages as a means of pressuring employers to bargain in good faith.

The extent to which the use of permanent replacements became the favored method to undermine the effect of strikes is borne out by the fact that strikes have become virtually non-existent and are no longer considered a very useful weapon. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2009 (the latest year available) the number of work stoppages reached its lowest level since 1947, when they first began collecting data on work stoppages.

With the building trades unions on the defensive, PATCO busted and the use of permanent striker replacements widespread, the next major assault on organized labor focused on industrial unions like the United Auto Workers, United Steel Workers, Machinists, IUE, etc. It came in the form of so-called free trade agreements like NAFTA

and provided employers with another mechanism to undermine unions by placing American workers directly in competition with much lower paid workers in other countries. With unionized workers in industries like auto, steel and aerospace making the highest wages and benefits they became primary targets of employers wanting to lower labor costs and the most vulnerable to foreign outsourcing.

Under not-so-free-trade agreements corporations can simply close down factories and move them to Mexico, India, China or wherever. Corporations pay little or no tariffs on the products they export back to the U.S. On top of that they can get tax breaks for moving good-paying union jobs to foreign countries. What a great deal! Also, foreign corporations that agree to operate non-union factories in America, like large auto assembly plants, receive huge tax breaks, incentives and other competitive advantages over the unionized domestic producers and you get the same result--workers pitted against each other between unionized and non-union employers.

Not-so-free-trade-agreements, which facilitate the movement of factories to foreign countries, are an extension of the old "runaway shop" used by corporations for more than a century to run away from union shops in the heavy unionized industrial northeast and Midwest. Prior to the not-so-free-trade agreement era corporations ran away to southern states where adherence to Jim Crow, right-to-work-for-less and other traditions kept unions from expanding and gaining political and economic power.

Not-so-free-trade can be thought of as the runaway shop on steroids and has become an effective and widespread tool for getting rid of American unions and cowing those that remain. Corporations don't really have to get their hands dirty either. They really don't have to hire high priced union busting attorneys. They really don't have to deal with the NLRB or DOL. All they have to do is close the plant and move it to a foreign country where unions are weak, compliant or nonexistent and cooperative governments keep workers in line and union power to a minimum. Not-so-free-trade agreements have wiped out millions of good-paying American manufacturing jobs--a disproportionate number of these union jobs.

Now it is the public sector unions that are in the crosshairs of anti-union politicians and their corporate bosses. Given the history of anti-unionism in America over the past forty years it should come as no surprise they are now the target of large scale coordinated union busting. Just as the building trades and industrial unions have been targeted for destruction, public employees are now facing a gauntlet of anti-unionism aimed squarely at them. With more public sector employees belonging to unions than those in the private sector (7.9 million v. 7.4 million) and union membership rates for public sector workers substantially higher than the rate for private industry workers (37.4% v. 7.2%) it should come as no surprise that public sector unions are now the primary targets in the corporate war on workers and their unions.

The preceding condensed version of the last forty years of the corporate war on America's workers and their unions brings to mind one of the most moving and incisive quotations over the consequences of being divided against a common enemy. It is from

Pastor Martin Niemoller (1892-1984) referring to the rise of Nazi power in Germany and the complicity of those who failed to act to prevent the spread of the Nazi plague:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a socialist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a trade unionist;
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me –
and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Using Pastor Niemoller's words as a template and with profound respect, I would submit the following requiem for American workers for their complicity in or ignorance of the corporate war on America's workers and their unions:

Requiem for The American Worker

First they attacked the building trades unions,
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a member of the building trades;
Then they fired the air traffic controllers,
and I did not speak out –
because I was not an air traffic controller;
Then they shipped millions of union manufacturing jobs overseas,
and I did not speak out –
because I did not work in a union shop;
Then they vilified and attacked public sector unions,
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a member of a public employee union;
Then I needed a union –
and there were none left to speak out for me.

Minutes of the January 6, 2011 council meeting **Prepared by Berry Craig, recording secretary**

The Executive Board met at 6 p.m. with the following officers present: President Jeff Wiggins, Recording Secretary Berry Craig, Financial Secretary-Treasurer Brandon Duncan and Trustees Randy Gray and Howard "Bubba" Dawes.

Frances Wiggins, Labor Day committee treasurer, said the committee would meet on Jan. 25.

Dawes, the council COPE chair, said he had no information on bills pre-filed in the legislature.

Wiggins said the state AFL-CIO Legislative Committee was to meet on Jan. 18. He said USW Local 5-550, the union at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, especially wanted to see the legislature lift the moratorium on nuclear plant construction in Kentucky. Wiggins also said Indiana Republicans were pushing a right-to-work bill in the state legislature.

In addition, Wiggins outlined the correspondence he had received since the January meeting – a Christmas card from the White House plus three newsletters and eight mass mailings. Wiggins also read an email that said the health care reform law Congress passed last year makes small businesses more likely to provide health care for their employees.

Too, Wiggins went over the proposed per capita dues hike from eight cents to 15 cents, effective April 1. He said he notified the national AFL-CIO about the changes.

Finally, Wiggins announced that nominations for officers would be sought at the regular meeting and that the W.C. Young Award dinner would be discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

President Wiggins gaveled the regular meeting to order at 7 p.m. The same officers were present. The meeting began with the customary prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.

Wiggins reviewed the correspondence, and Duncan gave the financial report, which was approved unanimously.

Wiggins read a national AFL-CIO boycott list which includes two area TV stations: KBSI-Fox 23 in Cape Girardeau, Mo., and WDKA-My 49 in Paducah. Both are affiliates of the ultra-conservative and anti-union Sinclair Broadcast Group.

Wiggins read the proposed change in the bylaws to raise monthly per capita dues from 8 cents to 15 cents, effective April 1. A motion to accept the rate hike passed unanimously.

In other business:

-- Wiggins announced that Congress passed the bill that requires U.S. made flags to fly over the capitol and other government buildings. The bill originated with Council Vice President Benny Adair of the IAMAW.

-- Frances Willey announced that the Labor Day committee would meet on Jan. 25. She said she was retiring as treasurer. Wiggins also said he was stepping down as

committee president. Both said they would be glad to help the new treasurer, president and the rest of the committee. “If we don’t get more money, the only thing we will be doing is the parade anyway,” Wiggins said. “We tried to put on a bigger program this year, and it didn’t work very well. We tried to do something different but didn’t draw the crowd we needed to keep this thing going.”

-- COPE Director Howard “Bubba” Dawes said he was waiting to hear about bills of interest to labor that were being considered in the legislature.

-- Wiggins cited concerns about the continuing lack of building trades union participation in the council. “I am very discouraged in the leadership, especially when there is a lot of history with the building trades in the council. We work with them in other areas. It’s also fine to gripe and complain about things at the council. But we hash it out and then walk out the door united as union brothers and sisters fighting for the same cause.” Dawes suggested that the state AFL-CIO bylaws be changed to require all unions affiliated with the state AFL-CIO to participate in their area councils. Wiggins asked him to submit his suggestion in the form of a resolution at the 2011 state AFL-CIO convention.

-- Wiggins also said he was “ashamed to admit it, but a lot of our union folk went out and supported Rand Paul and that Tea Party stuff. I am also ashamed to hear all this racist talk against our president. All he has tried to do is help working people, and then you hear them say ‘I’m going to put that you-know-what in his place’ – only they don’t say ‘you-know-what.’ Racism is alive and well in Kentucky.” “And all over the country,” added delegate Hardy Williams.

-- In addition, Wiggins said union leaders have got to talk union issues to the rank-and-file year round “and not just two or three months before an election. Politics is 24-7, 365 days a year. We’ve got to be preaching to our members. We’ve got to do it, even if they don’t like what we say – even if we get cussed, tomatoed or tarred and feathered or run out on a rail. We’ve got to be talking to them because they’re hearing plenty from Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and the other nuts on radio and TV.”

-- Dawes said union leaders should also adapt to new communication methods such as text messaging and facebooking.

-- Wiggins also opened the floor for nominations for new council officers. The following delegates were nominated without opposition: Jeff Wiggins, president; Benny Adair, vice president; Berry Craig, recording secretary; Brandon Duncan, financial secretary-treasurer; David Burnett, sergeant-at-arms; Bo Johnson, Jim Key, David Childress and Hardy Williams, all trustees; and Howard “Bubba” Dawes, COPE chairman. Since no nominee has opposition, Wiggins directed Craig as secretary to cast one vote for everyone at the February meeting.

Brandon Duncan is new Labor Day committee head; Murt is VP

Brandon Duncan, area council financial secretary-treasurer, has been elected president of the Western Kentucky Labor Day Committee, the non-profit group that puts on Paducah's Labor Day program.

Ricky Murt of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 184 was elected vice president. The positions of recording secretary and treasurer are still open.

From Daily Kos **Union Basher Rand Paul's Blatant Hypocrisy on Violence**

by Randian

Rand Paul is liar and a blatant hater of working people!
In his ad for a proposed piece of antilabor legislation called the National Right to Work Act, Senator Rand Paul refers to mob violence, i.e., violence coming from union activists, or, in his own words that "forced unionism breeds violent strikes and a hate-the-boss mentality."

This coming from a Senator whose own supporters violently stomped on the head of a peaceful protestor.

Randian's diary:

Rand Paul is thus a blatant hypocrite.

Back in October, as I reported here, I had called Paul's campaign HQ and got a staffer on the phone with me, who then tried to rationalize Paul's supporters sickening violence against MoveOn volunteer Lauren Valle. My shock at what I heard led me to label Paul a sociopath, which while perhaps hyperbole on my part, expressed what I saw as Rand Paul's character: pathological lying, contemptuousness of those who seek to understand them, inability to perceive that anything is wrong with them, and a lack of remorse.

And sure enough, here is Rand Paul, libertarian and social darwinist, elected by fools who will not get the progressive representation that they actually need, doing all he can, in his first year in office, to be *the* go-to Senator for union bashing legislation.

Here he is, the Senator who rationalizes, excuses and downplays violence when it is on his side, invoking the spectre of violence coming from organized labor. and in invoking this spectre, doing so without any notion of context. And the context is one of a class warfare that has always been waged on workers by elitists, who have always been aided and assisted by people like Rand Paul.

Thus, we have the following. What this appears to really be targeting is the possibility of political action by unions. Rand Paul, if he could, would ban this (while of course, allowing businesses to continue with their PACs).

National Right to Work Act Petition to:

My U.S. Senators and Congressman

Whereas: Federal law permits Big Labor to confiscate \$8 billion from American workers' paychecks every year just to get or keep a job;

Whereas: This forced unionism breeds violent strikes and a hate-the-boss mentality which drive good jobs overseas, jack up prices and risk re-igniting inflation;

Whereas: Union bosses use this forced-dues fortune to corrupt our political system with over a billion dollars every election cycle;

Whereas: Union-puppet politicians routinely vote for higher taxes, bailouts, job-killing bureaucracy and even more porkbarrel spending keeping our nation locked in recession;

Therefore: I urge you in the strongest possible terms to strike a blow for freedom and American prosperity by co-sponsoring and casting your every vote in favor the National Right to Work Act.

Elsewhere, in promoting this petition, Paul uses violent rhetoric, talking about taking a "sledgehammer" to the unions.

Dear Concerned American,

They snickered when I said I came to the U.S. Senate to change Congress.

But their laughter stopped when I sponsored the National Right to Work Act to free U.S. workers from forced unionization and break Big Labor's multi-billion dollar political machine forever.

President Barack Obama and Big Labor allies in the Senate are now feverishly scheming to bury the National Right to Work Act without a vote.

So I have a question for you.

Will you be my sledgehammer?

Your signature on the petition to your Congressman and Senators is what is needed to bust through the opposition and force a vote on the National Right to Work Act.

Rand Paul is one of the main faces of the union bashing, teabagging reactionary politics right now, and he is a violence rationalizing hypocrite. To respond, it is time for progressives and the labor movement to come together. It is also time, as is pointed out below in some progressive commentary for Barack Obama and the Democratic leaders to recommit to workers, to stand up to GOP thuggery and lies, including projecting lies that are more self-descriptive of the right onto the left, and to stand up to the right's union bashing.

While I don't expect Rand Paul's union bashing legislation to get very far, the fact that he is promoting it, and how he is promoting it, should be an occasion for a progressive, articulate response. And it should also be an occasion for Democratic leaders, including President Obama, to stand up for working people and against reactionary, labor bashing actions by the likes of Rand Paul.



We support USW Local 7-669, which has been locked out at Honeywell in Metropolis, Ill., since June.

[Return to Western Kentucky AFL-CIO Area Council Home Page](#)