

U.S. House takes action on union organizing bill

As this issue of the Northwest Labor Press was going to press, the U.S. House of Representatives announced it would vote on House Resolution 800 — the Employee Free Choice Act — on March 1.

The result of that vote was not available until after this issue went to press, however, prior to the vote there were a bipartisan 233 co-sponsors of the bill, more than enough for passage in the House.

HR 800 is a top priority bill of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win. Its intent is to level the playing field between workers who want to join a union and their employers, who most of the time don't want their employees joining a union.

HR 800 would:

- Establish stronger penalties for violation of employee rights when workers seek to form a union and during first-contract negotiations.
- Provide mediation and arbitration for first-contract disputes.
- Allow employees to form unions by signing cards authorizing union representation without having to go through the National Labor Relations Board. Right now, card check is one

method the NLRB has approved for union recognition, but only if the employer agrees. Otherwise, unions and workers must go through a long, business-tilted NLRB elections process.

And though U.S. laws are supposed to protect workers' freedom to belong to a union, employers routinely harass, intimidate, coerce and even fire employees trying to gain a union so they can bargain for better pay, benefits and working conditions.

Cornell University scholar Kate Bronfenbrenner said 75 percent of employers hire outside consultants to run anti-union campaigns, often based on mass psychology and distorting the law. Bronfenbrenner has studied hundreds of organizing campaigns and found that:

- Ninety-two percent of private-sector employers, when faced with employees who want to join together in a union, force employees to attend closed-door meetings to hear anti-union propaganda; 80 percent require supervisors to attend training sessions on attacking unions; and 78 percent require that supervisors deliver anti-union messages to underlings.
- Half of employers threaten to shut

down partially or totally if employees join a union.

• In 25 percent of organizing campaigns, private-sector employers illegally fire workers because they want to form a union.

• Even after workers successfully form a union, in one-third of the instances employers do not negotiate a contract.

If unfair labor practice charges are filed, union campaigns can be delayed even longer. And, oftentimes if an employer is found guilty by the NLRB, the punishment is minimal, including posting a sign stating they won't do it any more.

Corporate front groups are waging a major campaign to stop HR 800, with support from President Bush.

Bush says he will veto the Employee Free Choice Act if it reaches his desk.

A group calling itself the "Coalition for a Democratic Workplace" claims to be rank-and-file workers who want to preserve their right to a secret ballot vote for a union. Reportedly, no rank-and-file workers are named in the coalition's literature, but some 20 or 30 employer groups are, ranging from the National Restaurant Association, to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

"Bush and some Republicans in Congress see labor unions as a threat to the bottom line of their corporate friends," said Rep. Phil Hare (D-Ill.). "Opponents of this legislation have every right to express their disdain for unions and the service they provide to working families. However, they do

not have the right to silence the will of the majority through scare tactics and intimidation during a National Labor Relations Board election."

As it stands, the bill doesn't have enough votes to pass the Senate, given that the Republican minority has promised to filibuster the bill once it hits the Senate floor. It requires 60 votes to end a filibuster and Democrats, who hold a 51-49 majority, don't have the votes to stop it. A vote in the Senate has not yet been scheduled.

Oregon Republican U.S. Senator Gordon Smith has yet to take a position on the bill. To talk to Smith or his staff about the Employee Free Choice Act, call him from Portland at 503-326-3386 or go to his Web site at: www.gsmith.senate.gov/public/.

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is very pleased to announce that effective January 1, 2007,

Gene Mechanic

has affiliated with our firm. Gene has relocated to Florida to work with the Service Employees International Union on organizing projects in the South. While he is working in Florida, Gene will be "of counsel" to our firm. We are proud to be affiliated with Gene and working together for the same cause.

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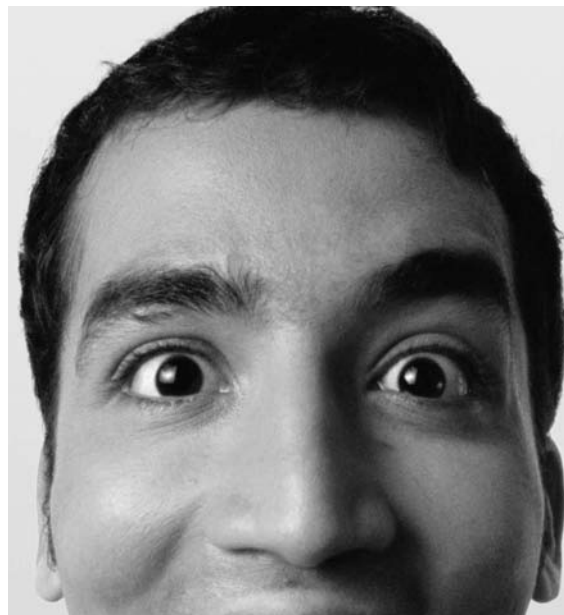


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