

# Open Forum

## Republicans ban word 'labor' from House committee

By Mike Hall  
National AFL-CIO

Petty. Petty. Petty. With major issues like jobs and the economy straining for attention, House Republican leaders took a big step to solving the nation's problems when they boldly acted — drum roll, please — to change the name of the Education and Labor Committee to the Education and Workforce Committee.

Give me a bleedin' break. They so hate the word "labor" because after all, it's often followed by the word "union." OMG!

The Education and Labor Committee was founded in 1867 and retained that name — except for a brief time when it was split into separate Education and Labor committees — through both Democratic and Republican majorities for 122 years.

In 1995, the last time a group of swaggering, loud-mouthed extremists — remember Newt and his cohorts, the tea party forebears? — hit Capitol Hill, they stripped the word "labor" from the committee door.

In 2006, figuring 122 years of congressional history should be honored, the new Democratic majority restored the word "labor."

So here's another symbolic bird-flip from Republicans to working people over a concept that's clearly unfamiliar to them: Labor.

## Disciplined unity gets results

To the Editor:

I agree with Brother Schell: "rioting in the streets" does not help build the labor movement in this country ("Rioting in the streets won't help cause," Jan. 7, 2011). However, disciplined unity in action does get results and increases our strength. When Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain called for "taking to the streets," I'm sure he was not advocating for the type of vandalism a few youth have exhibited on the streets of Europe in the past year.

I'm sure he was referring to the type of marches, rallies, strikes, blockades and sit-ins that millions of European workers employed — led by the union movement — to push back against em-

ployer-led attacks on their standard of living. These are the same tactics used by our own labor movement in the 1930s — which led to a huge increase the size of our movement and won us some of our most fundamental rights: to strike, to collectively bargain, to unemployment insurance, to a minimum wage, to social security.

Brother Chamberlain is suggesting that we are facing tough times where some of those fundamental rights are threatened. Tough times require tough tactics.

Jamie Partridge  
Letter Carriers 82  
Portland

## House GOP cuts jobs, funding to highway and transit programs

(From the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO.)

The 112th Congress has convened, and the first order of business by the Republican majority in the House of Representatives was, incredibly, to cut jobs and funding to highway and transit programs.

Specifically, House Republicans changed a number of longstanding rules, including one that historically ensured that money raised solely for highway and transit projects through the federal gas tax be spent on those projects.

The new rule change by the Republican majority in the House will henceforth allow highway and transit funds that have already been raised to sit idle in a bank account, reducing investment in highways and transit, and subsequently destroying jobs.

Despite the best efforts of moderate Republicans like Steve LaTourette of Ohio to reduce the negative impact of this rule change, Republican leadership

refused to modify their new rule. Apparently, they are more interested in perpetuating a shell game where highway and transit funds are held back in order to make it appear that the deficit has been reduced in the short-term, thus allowing Congress to continue to spend money on pet projects and cutting one of the best job-creation programs in the history of the country.

Last November, the American people demanded that Congress make economic growth and job creation their top priority. For the millions of unemployed in the construction industry, cutting funding that would put them to work repairing or replacing our crumbling bridges, highways and transit systems is not a solution; it's a slap in the face.

We thank Congressman LaTourette for his efforts to prevent this rule from taking effect. We will need more voices like his, if Congress plans on getting serious about fixing the real problem facing our country; which is JOBS.

## Dr. King's Legacy: Fighting for economic justice

In his latest book, "All Labor Has Dignity," historian Michael Honey brings together 16 of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches on economic justice, many of them unpublished until now. Honey, a professor at the University of Washington Tacoma, edited the speeches and wrote an introduction for the book. AFL-CIO Now senior writer James Parks interviewed Honey about King and his legacy of economic justice.

**Q: In All Labor Has Dignity, you say King's dream called for "economic equality." What does that mean and how do we achieve it?**

**Honey:** At various times he says he is not opposed to people having wealth, he's opposed to people having wealth at the expense of other people not hav-

ing wealth ... and ignoring the poor. His "Poor People's Campaign" was really about economic restructuring. His plan was to put pressure on Congress to shift its priorities from war and military spending to housing, health care, jobs and education, focusing especially on the people who were losing jobs because of automation of industry and outsourcing.

It was a two-pronged approach. One was that there were these people who were being thrown out of the economy to starve, and something had to be done about that. But secondly, the priorities of the country are all wrong.

**Q: What do you think King would say about the current economic crisis, its effects on working people and the**

**attack on public employee unions?**

**Honey:** In his speech to the AFL-CIO in 1961, King talked about the developing right-wing coalition that would threaten the labor movement and the civil rights movement. The quote is "the alliance between big military and big business or the coalition of Dixiecrats and militant reactionaries — whatever the form — these menaces now threaten everything decent and fair in American life. Labor today faces the greatest crisis. In the next 10 to 20 years, automation will grind jobs into dust. This period is made to order for those who would drive labor into impotency by viciously attacking it at every point of weakness."

His idea [to fight this developing

right-wing coalition] is to develop a mass coalition of labor, civil rights churches, anti-war, students — anybody who's moving in the same direction.

**Q: What is King's legacy today and how can we best honor it?**

**Honey:** King was a holistic thinker, and he said the problem is not just individuals; the problem is the system. The real evil is systematic. The three great evils are racism, militarism and materialism. Our country is under the control of those three evils, and we have to change the whole setup of the country to change that. If you look at him in that way, he's timely and timeless.

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