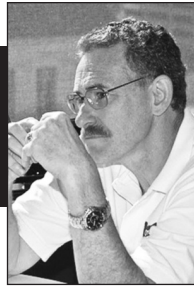


# Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



We had a sweet victory in November's election, with candidates winning the presidency, the U.S. Senate, and state and local elections. But our victories haven't slowed the advance of right-to-work for less.

Last year, Indiana and Michigan adopted the act. Now, proposed legislation in Maine and Pennsylvania could pass, leaving half of the United States with right-to-work for less laws. And, if just weakening unions wasn't enough, Kansas has introduced legislation to limit unions' political programs.

Those who acquire wealth and power by relying on the efforts of working people are silencing and weakening those same people whose work they rely on. To do that requires weakening our movement; it requires the elimination of the union movement as we know it. Why? Because we fight for the workers' share of profits. We believe that every American has a right to health care, and that the sick, disabled, poor and aged have a right to respect. We believe that as a nation we are responsible to care for all those who inhabit our nation, and that everyone should be treated with dignity and have a pathway to a better life.

Your share of the profits, your benefits, and your dignity, leave less for the people who get filthy rich off of your work.

The attacks have taken a toll and it was of little surprise a couple weeks ago when the Department of Labor reported that the U.S. had lost 400,000 union members in 2012. Wisconsin alone amounted to 65,000, or 16 percent of the losses.

My favorite coach often stated: "never change a winning game, but always change a losing one."

For the last two decades the union movement has played a losing game. To change our game we must realize that the union structure isolates us into sector silos: Manufacturing, Building Trades, Public Sector, and so on. It is a structure that limits our ability to jointly strategize, to maximize our resources, and to implement a united union strategy. It is not conducive to increasing our strength by building relationships with other progressive groups.

Unionists are task driven, whether it is a grievance or bargaining or winning elections. We complete our task and move on to the next one. It is a structure that is ill-equipped to change rapidly enough to meet today's challenges. But with shrinking membership comes shrinking budgets. And though fewer funds makes it more difficult, we can, we must, and we are changing the union's game.

The establishment of the Oregon Strong Voice tables brings communities, social activists, and unions

together to develop relationships that advance an agenda for the poor, communities of color, and the middle class. Today, Oregon Strong Voice is in Bend and Medford — and is coming this spring to Salem and Astoria. Service Employees International Union's "Workers Centers" in North and Northeast Portland are a creative approach to reach and advocate for nonunion workers. The AFL-CIO Organizing Pilot is a new collaborative way to organize that increases coordination and resource management between the national AFL-CIO and our affiliates. The innovation that is occurring in Oregon is an example for the national movement. The more unions coordinate and cooperate, the more our movement will grow in members, strength, and in allies.

We have the power to change this nation if we have the courage to understand that just as one worker cannot stand alone against the boss, it takes workers collectively standing together speaking in one voice to change the plight of the middle class as a movement.

We will only prevail — the future will only be on our side — when we begin to work together on a new vision to change this country.

*Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.*

## AFL-CIO plans national campaign for immigration reform

The national AFL-CIO is launching a nationwide campaign to support comprehensive immigration reform, including rallies, radio ads, and work-site educational efforts.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka and L.A. County Federation of Labor Executive Secretary-Treasurer Maria Elena Durazo announced the campaign Feb. 7, two days after labor leaders met with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office to discuss his proposals for immigration reform.

At that session, Obama outlined his immigration plan, which explicitly calls for worker rights for the undocumented.

Trumka said citizenship would benefit not just those workers — by ending their exploitation — but all workers, as companies often threaten to hire the undocumented to drive down wages and working conditions for everyone.

"Often, the first reason (those) workers band together" against employers "is not for better wages, but for getting them to pay wages at all," Trumka said.

At a Jan. 29 speech in Las Vegas, Obama declared that passing immigra-

tion reform legislation will be a priority of his Administration.

Obama proposes to strengthen border control and stiffen penalties for employers who knowingly hire unauthorized immigrants, while also streamlining the legal immigration system and giving law-abiding undocumented workers who are already in the United States a chance to legalize their status.

"We have to make sure that every business and every worker in America is playing by the same set of rules," Obama said in Las Vegas. "We have to bring this shadow economy into the light so that everybody is held accountable — businesses for who they hire, and immigrants for getting on the right side of the law."

The president's proposals are pretty close to the principles the AFL-CIO and the Change To Win union federation outlined in a 2009 "unity framework" for comprehensive immigration reform. Obama proposes to set up a process to legalize unauthorized immigrants: If they pay back taxes and fines and demonstrate a crime-free record and proof of having worked in the United States, they could apply for and

receive legal residency, and eventually, citizenship.

Other features of the president's proposal:

- Protection against retaliation for undocumented workers who exercise their labor rights.

- A "labor law enforcement fund" to help ensure that industries that employ significant numbers of immigrant workers comply with labor laws.

- A five-year phase-in of mandatory electronic employment verification, with exemptions for certain small businesses.

- Issuance of a fraud-resistant, tamper-resistant Social Security card and a requirement that workers use fraud-and-tamper-resistant documents to prove authorization to work in the United States.

The AFL-CIO also is working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on the one area of immigration where the two groups have strongly disagreed in the past: Guest workers.

Trumka said the AFL-CIO has opposed past guest worker programs that brought in millions of workers, mostly in farms, with no protections and a lot

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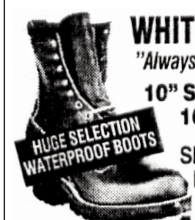
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