

# Billionaire casino owner Sheldon Adelson out to bust unions

By DANA SPITZER

LAS VEGAS (PAI) — Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire owner of The Venetian and Palazzo casinos in Las Vegas — who spent more than \$150 million on Mitt Romney and other Republican candidates in the 2012 election (\$91.8 million to Super PACs), says his new target for political contributions is going to be a union-busting campaign to get state governments to abolish collective bargaining rights.

In an interview with the Wall Street Journal published in December, Adelson said he intends to join the state-by-state effort by Republicans to weaken unions by getting rid of collective bargaining.

Adelson's casinos are the only non-union casinos and hotels on the Las Vegas Strip.

In December, 500 union nurses and labor allies picketed Adelson outside The Venetian, chanting, "Our democracy is not for sale to the highest bidder!"

National Nurses United (NNU), joined by local union activists, picketed The Venetian to protest billionaire Adelson's ongoing efforts to corrupt U.S. democracy through massive spending on elections.

NNU was meeting in convention in Las Vegas. Leaders and members of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (UNITE HERE) and construction and building trades members joined NNU's picketing.

Adelson spent some \$150 million on the elections, mostly to elect extremely conservative candidates.

"He represents the worst face of American politics today, the efforts of billionaires, millionaires, and Wall Street interests to buy our elections and democracy at the expense of everyone else," said NNU Co-President Deborah Burger, a registered nurse.

"Our action will be a message to Adelson and the rest of the 1%, that we will not allow our democracy to be put on the auction block. This country is not for sale," Burger said.

The union-busting effort in the states has been financed for years by a small group of billionaires, including the infamous Koch brothers (David and Charles), the National Right-to-Work Committee, and a small army of wealthy anti-union employers in nearly every state.

Their most recent victory was in getting a right-to-work (for less) law passed in Michigan. Earlier, they got a right-to-work law passed in Indiana.

Adelson, who acknowledged in the interview that he probably spent more in this year's campaign than the \$150 million made public so far, said he intended to "double down" on his political contributions in the next year or two, with a focus on the states.

Right-to-work laws strip unions of the ability to receive dues from workers whom their contracts cover. That produces thousands of "free riders" —

workers who get union services in bargaining and on-the-job protection, but don't have to pay for them.

Enacting so-called right-to-work laws has been a key business cause for more than 50 years. But right-to-work gained momentum with the GOP sweep of governorships and legislatures in the 2010 off-year election.

Right-wing zealots, led by Tea Partyite Republicans in the Indiana Legislature, lame-duck Republicans in the Michigan Legislature — who rammed right-to-work through in December, after the 2012 election — and conservatives in New Hampshire, enacted the bills. New Hampshire's Democratic Gov. John Lynch vetoed right-to-work in the Granite State, noting businesses told him it would actually hurt the state's economy.

Adelson spent about \$50 million on Romney's campaign, \$15 million on Newt Gingrich in the GOP primaries, and millions more in congressional races. While most of his candidates lost, he is credited with helping Republicans retain control of the U.S. House.

His money helped Sen. Dean Heller, (R-Nev.), win election to finish an unexpired term.

An effort in Missouri last year to adopt a right-to-work law failed. But Republican Tim Jones, the new state House Speaker, has said he will push for a Missouri law in the next session of the Legislature.

Because Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon vows to veto any right-to-work bill that reaches his desk, a new proposal is likely to be a ballot issue that would require approval by Missouri voters and would not go to the governor if it passes the Legislature.

Don't be surprised to see Adelson's millions behind the right-to-work effort.

Illinois Democrats have healthy majorities in both chambers of the state Legislature. Gov. Pat Quinn is a De-

mocrat. Legislative leaders see little chance of a right-to-work law passing in Illinois in the foreseeable future, but business interests are contemplating introducing the measure, anyway. Quinn, however, has demanded a state Senate vote in January on legislation eliminating collective bargaining rights for public workers, the Illinois AFL-CIO says.

(Editor's Note: Dana Spitzer is managing editor of the St. Louis Labor Tribune.)

A select group of individual millionaires and billionaires have used Super PACs to exert massive influence over federal elections. For example, 99 people contributed at least \$1 million, accounting for nearly 60% of all the individual contributions to Super PACs (see Figure 11).

FIGURE 11: THE CLOUT OF THE VERY WEALTHY: THE MILLIONAIRES' CLUB



Source: Dēmos and U.S. PIRG Education Fund analysis of FEC and Sunlight Foundation data.

Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire casino magnate, and his wife Miriam were the two largest donors to Super PACs in the 2012 cycle, giving a combined \$91.8 million. That's a lot of money — but, as Mother Jones magazine has pointed out, not to them. The Adelson family has an estimated net worth of \$24.9 billion, which means that \$91.8 million is just 0.37% of their total wealth. That's the equivalent of the average middle class family (with a net worth of \$77,300) spending \$285 on this election. It would take 322,000 average-earning American families giving \$285 to match the Adelson family's giving (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 12: ADELSONS' INFLUENCE



Source: Dēmos and U.S. PIRG Education Fund analysis of FEC and Sunlight Foundation data.

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