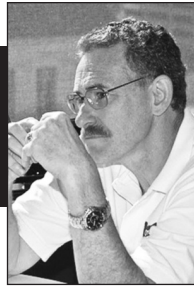


Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



Often this column focuses on what is wrong with America, corporations, and the wealthy who focus on profits rather than what is in the long-run best interest of our people. Economic inequity has plagued this nation since Ronald Reagan instituted his trickle down economic philosophy, and it has resulted in the greatest transfer of wealth from the poor and middle class to the very wealthy we've ever seen in such a short period of time.

In 1976, the top 1 percent of Americans owned 7 percent of America's wealth. Today, they own 40 percent.

Witnessing the transfer of wealth and its corresponding impact on American families, and watching the fiscal strangulation of government services, which directly translates to loss of opportunity for Americans, one can't help but wonder where the push back is — where the voice for everyday Americans that will inspire and instill the prospect of hope — is.

The American workers' movement has been that vehicle for change and that voice for something more.

In the 1930s and '40s, our movement's ability to adapt to mechanization of industries resulted in millions of workers organizing to build strength and power. One of the problems we face as a union movement today, though, is that we are stuck on a structure and delivery system that was built on that foundation over 80 years ago. While our innovations were groundbreaking and wildly successful in the '30s and '40s, they've

proven to be slow, and their improvements isolated to unions and our members, without bringing improvements to the millions of nonunion workers we need to help now in 2013.

Meeting the challenges of the 21st century will require our workers' movement to evolve into a movement that speaks, advocates, and fights for all workers — for the poor, the aged, and the disadvantaged.

The AFL-CIO is in the midst of a major transformation that will culminate at the national AFL-CIO convention held this September in Los Angeles.

Over the last two years, the AFL-CIO has implemented pilot programs in various cities and states to evaluate new and innovative ideas in organizing, communications, and community partnership programs. These pilots have mapped a path to the future for American workers.

As a single example: We now know that unions can coordinate organizing, sharing resources and experience to grow our movement. Such an effort will require a greater emphasis on organizing at the local level. We understand that our economy has evolved and will continue to evolve. We have more independent contractors and more businesses with low wages that result in a more transient workforce. Traditional organizing doesn't fit for these workers. But maybe new models — such as the National Taxi Workers Alliance or the Retail Action Project, which create a union membership that follows the worker, providing worker representation at a nonunion

worksite, building political power and instilling a unionist identity — would.

The AFL-CIO convention will evaluate traditional and non-traditional models within the union movement, and it will begin the process of rebuilding from the grassroots up. The strength and weakness of our movement is our state federations and central labor councils (CLCs). Through those bodies, national and local issues and programs are implemented. The stronger, more nimble and effective state federations and CLCs are, the stronger our movement will be.

AFL-CIO convention delegates will vote on a range of issues that will increase state and local bodies' professionalism, transparency, and accountability through requirements for strategic planning, increased coordination with the national AFL-CIO, and standards that will result in an increased focus of state federation and CLCs on all types of organizing.

Our movement will continue to face many challenges. We have faced them before and responded with vigor, innovation and the understanding that failure to take challenges is not acceptable.

In Oregon, we are ready for this new model. 2013 is our opportunity to respond strongly to the future, and to put the future on our side.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

...Grain company locks out Vancouver Longshore

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Grain and the others want a contract on similar terms to the one that ILWU signed with EGT in Longview, Washington, and with Kalama Export in Kalama. Those contracts contain major concessions in union rights and workplace rules.

At the March 8 rally, Cager Clabaugh, president of ILWU Local 4, said United Grain is spending millions of dollars bringing in an anti-union security firm and housing out-of-state replacement workers. "They're spending I don't know how many millions of dollars to get rid of us. Why? They want to take our union protection, and that's it; eliminate our voice from the workplace. We're here to show them that we're not going to let that happen. We don't care how long. We're going to win this struggle."

ILWU International Vice President Ray Familathe said the union is mobilizing support worldwide. "If they want to take this fight from Vancouver to wherever, we're ready. We are going to battle; one day longer, one day stronger!" he said.

Locally, leaders from the Teamsters and the Inlandboatmen's Union said its members support locked-out ILWU members at the Port of Vancouver.

Teamster drivers will not cross the ILWU picket line, declared Tony Andrews, president of Portland-based Teamsters Joint Council No. 37. "We protect your work; you protect ours," he said.

Alan Cote of the Inlandboatmen's Union said his members, too, will honor ILWU picket lines. "It will be as difficult as humanly possible to bring ships in and use tugboats on this river. (We) have your back."

The lockout means loss of employment for members of ILWU Local 4, which dispatches eight to 22 members per shift for up to two eight-hour shifts a day when ships are at the terminal. Local 4 represents 200 men and women who have loaded grain and other cargo at the Port of Vancouver since 1934.

On the lockout's first day, ILWU members picketed at the main gate to the Port of Vancouver from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Members declined to cross the picket line, and as a result, a ship carrying Subaru vehicles was not unloaded. The next day ILWU shifted its picket to the east gate, and the Subaru ship was unloaded.

To improve conditions for picketers, the Port of Vancouver removed barriers to nearby parking, laid down gravel, and arranged to bring in a porta-potty.

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