

## High Court strikes down the heart of the Voting Rights Act

By ARLENE HOLT BAKER

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision effectively striking down the heart of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by a 5-to-4 vote is shameful and a major setback to democracy.

Fifty years ago, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and I believe as he did that the "arc of the moral universe... bends toward justice." But the June 25 decision twists that bend in the wrong direction.

### Favorability ratings for unions goes up

Most Americans now have a favorable view of unions, according to a new survey by Pew Research.

The Business Journal reported that 51 percent of Americans now have a favorable view of labor unions, up from only 41 percent two years ago. The survey found that 61 percent of Americans under 30 years of age view unions favorably. Only 51 percent in this age bracket view businesses favorably.

The Pew Research survey found that 55 percent of Americans have a favorable view of business corporations, compared with 39 percent who have an unfavorable view of them. Two years ago, 52 percent of Americans had an unfavorable view of corporations.

When I was a young girl growing up in Fort Worth, Texas, my mother could not buy me a new pair of shoes because she had to pay her poll tax. She was a full-time domestic worker and my father was a laborer and, like many hard-working families during that time, my parents had to make those kinds of hard decisions. And she chose to exercise her right to vote.

She knew that the right to vote is essential in the struggle toward justice — that it is the cornerstone of American democracy; it provides voice to the voiceless; it provides an opportunity to access and exercise power that can counter economic, social, gender and

racial inequalities.

Like so many other working people of their time, my parents were resilient. They experienced the dehumanizing barriers to justice — but they believed that with time and struggle those barriers would fall.

And they did. When Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, barriers fell. In 2006, when Congress reauthorized the act by sweeping majorities in both parties, barriers fell.

Today, we have gone backward. This decision has placed a stamp of approval on barriers to justice.

But like my parents, we are resilient. We won't give up. In fact, we are more

mobilized than ever to ensure the right to vote for all people and equal access to the polls. As many states have moved to suppress the right to vote for people of color, poor people and young people, 44 states this year proposed legislation to strengthen voting rights and seven states successfully passed measures that would do just that. And members of Congress committed to democracy are pledging to revive protections against persistent voting rights attacks.

America's working families will continue the fight for social and economic justice. And we'll do that by ensuring every single person has equal ac-

cess to the ballot box.

We call on Congress to act forcefully and expeditiously in a bipartisan manner to ensure that every voter remains protected.

*(Editor's Note: Arlene Holt Baker is executive vice president of the national AFL-CIO. She is the first African American to be elected to one of the federation's three highest offices and the highest-ranking African American woman in the labor movement.)*

## The Roberts Corporate Court strikes again

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### THE POWERFUL OVER THE PEOPLE

On June 25, we celebrated two landmark Supreme Court rulings advancing LGBT rights, but a closer look at the rest of the Supreme Court term reveals a wide variety of troubling rulings. These rulings may be on different issues, but they all have a common

theme: Whenever possible the High Court's conservative wing puts the interests of the powerful above those of the people. This term the Supreme Court has issued rulings attacking voting rights, consumer rights, workers' rights, and more.

In particular, the Roberts Court chooses to side with powerful corporations at almost every possible opportunity. Even conservative-leaning Supreme Courts in the past have not sided with corporations as often. For

example, in cases where the powerful U.S. Chamber of Commerce intervened, they won barely more than half the time under Chief Justice Rehnquist. Since Chief Justice Roberts and Alito joined the court in 2006, the Chamber has won 70 percent of its cases. Over the past two terms alone, the Chamber has prevailed in a whopping 88 percent of its cases. In fact, the Roberts Court is the most pro-corporate Supreme Court in more than six decades.

Here are a few of the areas where the court trampled on the people at the expense of the powerful:

- **Voting Rights:** The Court gutted a key provision of the Voting Rights Act. As a result, six states are already moving forward with voter suppression laws that previously would've been held up or blocked entirely. If individuals cannot vote, they of course cannot vote for politicians who support progressive or populist policies or vote against those who are the tools of corporate special interests like polluters, insurance companies, and Wall Street banks.

- **Workers' Rights:** In two decisions also handed down last week, the Court made it much harder for victims of workplace discrimination to seek justice. The first case severely limited the definition of who counts as a supervisor, making it much easier for people to be intimidated out of taking action against harassment by their bosses. A second decision issued the same day made it much easier for corporations or supervisors to retaliate against individuals who complain about discrimination.

- **Human Rights:** In April, the Court severely limited a 200-year-old law that allowed individuals to use the U.S. civil court system to seek recourse for human rights violations committed abroad. Chief Justice John Roberts led a splintered court in ruling that several Nigerians alleging an oil company aided an abetted torture, arbitrary

killings, and indefinite detention could not sue, because the corporate conduct occurred outside the United States. It is now essentially impossible to hold anyone accountable for such conduct.

- **Consumer Rights:** The Roberts Court has made a habit of issuing rulings that limit the ability of individuals to file class action lawsuits and/or seek justice outside the arbitration system that heavily favors corporations. The Court issued several such rulings this term, making it harder for individuals or even millions of individuals impacted by wrongdoing or some other harm to take on powerful corporations.

In addition, the Court ruled in favor of pharmaceutical companies, authorized what should be unconstitutionally intrusive police collection of DNA, undermined the rights of indigent defendants, and sided with big developers and trampled on "local community rights," among other unfortunate decisions.

Based on the cases the Court has agreed to hear next term, it appears we may be in for more of the same. The Court will hear cases on abortion rights, housing discrimination, the separation of church and state, the ability of the president to fill executive vacancies in the face of Senate obstruction, affirmative action, and environmental laws, just to name a few potentially explosive decisions.

When the Court managed to rule against corporate interests and the powerful, it almost always came over the objections of Chief Justice Roberts and the other members of the Court's conservative wing.

**BOTTOM LINE:** In spite of some bullets dodged and landmark victories, the Roberts Corporate Court continued to distinguish itself by overwhelmingly favoring corporate interests and the powerful over the rights and interests of individuals and the American people.

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