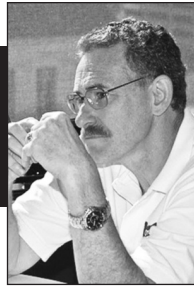


Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



The June 30th *Harris v Quinn* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court is one more step down the path of an activist court that continues to march towards increased corporate power.

While some will argue that the decision — which allows union-represented workers the option of becoming freeloaders, with all the rights and benefits of a union contract — could have been worse. This conclusion ignores the full context of the decisions this court has made on the march to increase corporate power at the expense of the power of middle- and low-wage workers.

A little bit on this decision:

When I worked for Gov. Ted Kulongoski in 2004-05, home care workers were collectively fighting for wages, health care and workers' compensation coverage. I'll admit that there was some skepticism around the office because we assumed that the bulk of these workers were family members of the patient. Today, I know from experience that home care workers more likely than not are not family members, but professionals who take care of the daily needs of their patients.

This is a difficult job. Making sure the patient is fed and taking their medication; getting patients to appointments with doctors, physical therapists, and a list of other professionals; taking care of the patient's most intimate daily needs.

In many cases, on top of all this, a home care worker is a patient's closest confidant.

Understand, too, home care is

cheaper for taxpayers and better than placing patients in institutions.

Home care workers have a better life since they joined the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) — better wages, health care, workers' comp insurance and increased training opportunities. Their patients are now better off as well. The training home care workers receive has led to higher quality care for patients and a corresponding reduction in trips to the emergency room. Increases in pay and benefits has also reduced turnover.

Unionization of home care workers has professionalized the occupation, gaining better outcomes for patients and lower costs for taxpayers. This is the good stuff that only happens when workers have a voice.

Now, back to the Supreme Court's slow march.

The U.S. Supreme Court is part of a methodical march toward "corporatization" of America. It is a long-term strategy where victory is measured in inches. But those inches are adding up. This march began with President Ronald Reagan, whose actions against the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) and whose administration's disdain for the National Labor Relations Board emboldened corporatists to take on our workers' movement.

We have witnessed the rise of corporate campaigns fueled by consultants and attorneys who bully and frighten workers. Couple that with our outdated labor laws,

and it makes forming a union extremely difficult.

After four decades of a shrinking labor movement — which tracks point by point with the decline of workers' wages and increased wage disparity — you would think Democrats would be laser-focused on rebalancing the power dynamic between workers and Corporate America. Sadly, that has not been the case.

What is exciting about the home care, child care and domestic worker organizing we've seen over the past 10 years is that it is the best example of the union movement not only being innovative to meet the needs of workers in an evolving economy, but it directly betters the living standards of some of our lowest wage workers.

Harris v Quinn will not stop our union movement from evolving to meet the needs of workers in the 21st Century. It will not stop the unprecedented coalescing of a worldwide workers' movement. It will not stop the need for workers' collective voice on the job. It will not stop the courage and boldness of workers who fight every day for a better life.

They took another inch. But we can still regain workers' power.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

...Longshore bargaining

(From Page 1)

in Sydney, Australia, were notified they'd be laid off after their employer deploys driverless robots to take over cargo handling.

ILWU has grappled before with the challenge of technology: Starting in the 1960s, containerization diminished the need for ILWU members' labor. The union responded by negotiating its Mechanization and Modernization Agreement in 1960, in which employers committed to give displaced members the work of maintaining and repairing the technologies that replaced them. Along similar lines, the 2002 ILWU contract opened the docks to bar scanners, automated manifest systems and GPS technology. The 2008 agreement permitted automated stacking cranes. In each case, maintenance and repair work was assigned to ILWU

members to offset the job losses from new technologies, with some exceptions: The contract agreed that a number of terminals would be "red-circled," meaning ILWU members would not do the work of maintaining and repairing cargo-handling equipment there. The arrangement sometimes put ILWU in competition with other unions. ILWU cited jurisdictional disputes as a primary factor in its decision to disaffiliate from the AFL-CIO in August 2013.

Preserving health insurance is another big priority. PMA's health plan is one of the last of the good union health plans, with the employer picking up substantially all health care costs for employees and their dependents, and patients paying just \$1 for prescriptions. But starting in 2018, under the 2010 Affordable Care Act (also referred to as Obamacare), employers would have to pay a 40 percent excise tax on the amount over \$27,500 a year for family coverage. To avoid that draconian tax, employers around the country are seeking to make benefits less generous, shifting costs to workers.

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