

Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



Pope's message not shared by right-wing

On Sept. 22, Pope Francis will step onto American soil. Arguably the most popular Pope in modern history, Pope Francis's message of hope, justice, income equality and love stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric of hate and greed of the conservative right. Those of the Trumps' and Koch brothers' ilk, who thirst for issues that divide the American people; who continue to foster a political strategy vilifying immigrants, those of a different culture or religion, the poor, women, and yes, unions. This strategy taps into the dark recesses of human nature: capitalizing on hate and fear to increase profit and power.

Is it any wonder Congress spent its time on maintaining defense funding that is higher than Russia, China, England, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia combined? That's 20 percent of our budget compared to 2 percent dedicated to education, and 3 percent for infrastructure.

Rather than improving our infrastructure to create millions of jobs and make America competitive in a world economy, we rank 25th in per-capita spending on infrastructure — behind Spain,

Saudi Arabia, and South Korea.

America's "me first" economy doesn't look out for working people. It encourages the exploitation of workers in search of profit. The development of a "shared economy" destroys employee/employer relationships by putting millions of workers into independent contractor status to increase employer profits by transferring expenses of employment onto workers. From hospitality workers, to cab and delivery drivers, these concepts will only expand in the future to have an impact on a major section of our economy.

"Sharing economy" services will expand in the future, and the relationship between the employer and employee must be challenge and changed.

Pope Francis stands in stark contrast to an economy thriving on worker exploitation. Many talk about income inequality, but refuse to take the painful steps to reverse the course. If we are serious about income equality, we would reform the eight-decade-old National Labor Relations Act. The NLRA was a beacon of hope for millions of working

people, and has become a system easily manipulated by corporations denying workers the right to a union and to collectively bargain.

Instead, the conservative right vilifies our unions. Pope Francis has called on the faithful to fight for social benefits, including retirement, holidays, more time off, and the freedom to participate in trade unions. Pope Francis pulled no punches when he spoke directly to employers in a speech he delivered from the Vatican this past February. He made the point to mention that attending church or donating to the church does not make up for injustices against workers.

"Using God to cover injustice is a very grave sin," he said. "If you go to Mass on Sunday and take communion, you should ask: 'What is the relationship with your employees? Do you pay them off the books? Do you pay them a fair salary? Do you pay the pension contributions?'"

While Pope Francis's journey through America during the third week in September may not resonate with Wall Street or corporate America, my hope is that it resonates with working people by inspiring them to fight for their fair share of the American economy.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, a 120,000-member-strong federation of labor unions.

Union nominees sought for labor relations awards

The Oregon chapter of the Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA) is seeking nominations of union stewards and officers for its annual Maggie Awards. The awards recognize

people who have achieved excellence in labor-management relations. Individuals honored must have demonstrated integrity and commitment to the collective bargaining process, and have extensive experience in collective bargaining.

Nomination forms are avail-

able at www.OregonLERA.com.

Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony following LERA's annual conference Nov. 17 at the World Trade Center, 121 SW Salmon St., Portland.

For more information, email president@oregonlera.com.

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