

Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



Ireland's corporate agenda

To see the result of a corporate agenda run amok, just look to Ireland. At 12.5 percent, Ireland's corporate tax is one of the lowest in the world. The U.S. corporate tax rate is 35 percent. Many American corporations are now headquartered in Ireland: Google, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft, to name just a few. Some corporations have factories in Ireland, while others have just enough of a presence to dodge U.S. taxes.

The shift in Ireland's governmental philosophy of what is good for business is good for Ireland has predictable results. Most U.S. corporations that have Irish facilities oppose a unionized workforce. Master labor agreements bargained between businesses, the government, and labor unions have been declared unconstitutional in Ireland.

Irish workers do not have a right to collective bargaining and without master agreements their ability to negotiate for better lives is diminished. Currently, 25 percent of Irish workers belong to a

union, but that percentage is dropping, and now more unionized workers are in the public sector.

Jobs created since the 2008 recession pay significantly less than pre-recession jobs.

Absent master agreements, the plight of Irish workers is very similar to American workers: shouldering more responsibility of funding vital services like healthcare, education, infrastructure, feeding the poor, and providing housing — all while wages and benefits are eroded. At the same time, corporate and Wall Street profits are at record levels.

What is ironic is 100 years ago on Easter in the streets of Dublin, and throughout Ireland, over 3,000 Irish trade unionists and socialists fought for independence and social justice. Their Proclamation of Independence reflects the values of shared prosperity, equal rights for all regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or religion. Within five days, the British Empire crushed their dream

of a nation of workers. Within three weeks, all the leaders of Easter Rising were executed by firing squad and 3,000 were placed in British prisons. In 1921, 26 of Ireland's 32 counties split from the British Empire, forming the Irish Free States now known as the Republic of Ireland. I am sure those who fought and died in the Easter Rising of 1916 would be appalled to see Ireland as a corporate tax haven.

Irish working people, like Americans, are tired of an economy where their sweat and toil rewards the rich and powerful, but does little or nothing for working people. Working people have become disenfranchised from political parties, not trusting elected representatives who time and time again chose a corporate agenda. That corporate agenda thirsts for increasingly cheaper labor costs and pits state against state, country against country, seeking greater incentives in exchange for jobs that all too often disappear when the incentives expire.

The corporate agenda will not be derailed overnight. It is a battle of inches

gained and lost. We are in the trenches each election cycle, holding elected representatives accountable. And we can see working people's victories: The governor of Oregon and the Oregon Legislature fought for working people during the 2016 legislative session, passing renter protections, a higher minimum wage, and solutions to address Oregon's affordable housing shortage. Gov. Kate Brown, Senate President Peter Courtney, and House Speaker Tina Kotek provided the leadership needed to find solutions to some of Oregon's challenges. As Gov. Brown stated at the minimum wage bill signing, 'we find solutions to Oregon's problems by bringing organizations and citizens together to find common ground.'

That is the Oregon way, and frankly, it's why Oregon is a leader in advancing a working peoples' agenda.

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



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