

CHAMBERLAIN, from page 4

electricians union, that have really embraced this changing environment as it relates to solar and wind and improved grids, and really being on the forefront of that.

If you go out to IBEW 48, they have a solar-powered building, and they've really trained their apprentices to have the skills to meet this new industry, so it just depends on the union.

Emily Green: *About three years ago, the national AFL-CIO reversed its stance on undocumented immigrants, who some labor organizations have traditionally seen as a threat to jobs, and instead has launched a campaign in support of immigration reform. Why is the AFL-CIO sticking its neck out to support workers that might be undercutting wages?*

T.C.: First of all, I don't believe they

undercut wages. If you look at the data, it proves the opposite. If you look at Social Security, for example, here you have undocumented workers who can't collect Social Security, who go to work every day,

pay into a system, they will never get a benefit. We at the Oregon AFL-CIO believe that all workers, whether you are documented or not, have rights.

CAUSA, which is the largest immigrants' rights group in the state, is housed in this office. We have a very strong relationship with them.

It's really easy, after watching the (first) presidential debate, to see why Donald Trump has some appeal.

If you don't know undocumented workers, if they're just faces in a crowd, it's really easy to villainize them.

But if you go to a CAUSA or PCUN rally and a speaker comes out and they're a mother who's being deported and her kids and her American husband are in the audience – that changes you.

If you're a human being, you have to sympathize with those folks, and the bottom line is, NAFTA was one of the drivers that destroyed the collective farm in Mexico – that undermined their economy. We did that, and we have a responsibility to those folks.

Anybody who tells you they wouldn't flee a place where they can't earn a living for their kids to find a better life, they are crazy, because I think that every human being would do that. I feel pretty strongly about this issue.

E.G.: *The decline of unions has, in part, been tied to the decline in wages of even nonunion workers. Is this a dynamic you've seen reflected in Portland?*

T.C.: Yes, absolutely. If you go back to the late '70s and '80s, when our proportion of the workforce that belonged to unions was high – in Oregon it was around 33 percent – what was negotiated in contracts was given to everyone, because people wanted to be competitive.

But now as our density has shrunk, in Oregon, we're one of the highest states – our union density is 17 to 18 percent – but it's not high enough to impact non-union workers.

What you're seeing is the rise of legislative benefits – sick days, minimum wage, retirement – things we passed last legislative

session, and business chafed at that.

But business can't have it both ways. They can't say, "No we don't want a union," and then say, "We're going to oppose this legislation because it adds to our cost."

Folks need a safety net. Folks need a minimum standard of living and a minimum of benefits to maintain their livelihood.

You're either going to do that legislatively, or you're going to change the laws that were put into effect in 1935 (the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 established most workers have the right to organize a union) that have not really been changed since then, except for in 1947 (Labor-Management Act of 1947, which union leaders called a "slave labor" bill, made significant revisions to the 1935 legislation).

You can't keep workers with outmoded laws, where the employer can come in and have one-on-one meetings and tell you, "If you join a union, you'll be fired" or "If you join a union, we're going to offshore this company" or "If you join a union, our profits will go down, and we'll close the doors."

This country needs to be about the people, not corporations, and we have an unbalanced system.

I think what Americans have lost sight of is that there is an equation here. The business owner puts up capital; that's his or her investment in the company. The worker's investment is probably, to me, more valuable, because it's their time. It's pieces of their lives that they could have been doing other things. That has value, too.

Since the decline of the labor movement, we no longer have the collective voice we once had.

E.G.: *What industries in Portland would you say are most staunchly opposed to labor union?*

T.C.: You name it. I'll tell you right now, there is not a business owner today that if you walked in and say, "We want a union," that they're going say, "Oh great! Come on down!"

The first thing the owner is going to say, if they're a small business, is "What'd I do wrong?" If it's a big business, it's usually, "I'm losing control," and there's a fight.

We tried to organize a facility that had 300 workers, they spoke seven different languages, and probably 65 percent of those workers had signed cards saying they wanted to join a union.

And the facility brought in a union buster who was an attorney from Chicago, had one-on-one meetings, actually gave people gift certificates to Starbucks if they came in and sat down and talked to them. Most of these folks were here on visas, and he told them, "If you join a union, and you went home, you won't have a job to come back to." In other words, you couldn't come back to the United States.

On the day of the election, the floor supervisor, who happened to speak the language of those seven different groups, escorted, one by one, those workers to the voting booth, talking to them all the way.

Do we have oppositions to unions in this city? Yeah, we do. We lost that election by the way. When people are scared, it takes great courage to join a union.

E.G.: *Can you tell me what facility that was?*

T.C.: I can't. It happened last spring. It was one of the most horrendous things I've ever seen.

Editor's note: Chamberlain's description of events is consistent with Northwest Labor Press

reports of union-busting activities at Portland Specialty Baking in Gresham earlier this year.

The bakery "makes pretzels, cakes, donuts, bagels and muffins for Starbucks, Jamba Juice, Walmart, Costco and Winco for wages of around \$10 an hour," Don McIntosh reported in the union-supported newspaper.

A class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of seven workers by the Northwest Workers Justice Project in August claims the bakery required workers to work more than 13 hours in a 24-hour period and systematically failed to pay overtime.

E.G.: *Are these union-busting tactics pretty typical of your experience?*

T.C.: It's very typical, the tactics that are used. There is always a reliance on fear to stop an organizing drive, but I've never seen anything quite like this.

E.G.: *It seems like Burgerville has been successful. Do you know what they did that enabled them to form a union?*

T.C.: Well, they haven't actually formed a (traditional) union. What they asked Burgerville to do

is recognize card check, (which means the majority of the workers have signed cards indicating intent to join a union). Burgerville, a month ago, is starting to have one-on-one meetings with their workers, so it's going down the same path.

E.G.: *You said the AFL-CIO has played a big role in the housing crisis, and you are doing something rather interesting with your office. Can you talk a little bit about that?*

T.C.: What we are planning on doing is tearing down this facility. We have a pretty big chunk of land, eight-tenths of an acre. And we're going to tear down this and build somewhere between 100 and 120 units of low-income housing – right here on this spot.

The busiest bus line in the city is right there on Powell, so there is a lot of convenience here. We're not that far from downtown Portland, so it has a lot of benefit. The labor movement is more than just representing workers, it's a social movement. It should be a vehicle for change.

Our goal is not only to create low-income housing, but to create a child care facility so that folks in the neighborhood and folks who live here have the opportunity to have child care close to where they live, but to really make it something special.

That's the goal – what I'm learning is, a lot of my pipe dreams are being shot down because it comes down to what can you afford, but it's still on the table.

E.G.: *What are AFL-CIO and Oregon Strong Voice's legislative priorities for next session?*

T.C.: Fair scheduling is a high priority for us. Family leave is a big priority for us. The transportation package is crucial.

Because of the trade agreements, we live in a very competitive world and we rely on getting goods and services and people to work. If we

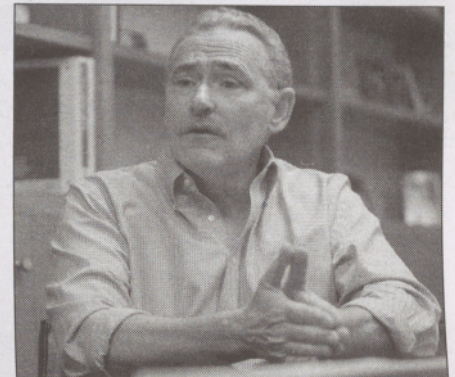


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TOM CHAMBERLAIN,
OREGON AFL-CIO PRESIDENT