



# CURRENT POLITICS



## Political Opinion

### Vote No On Measure 12 Law Protects Fair Wage For Minorities, All Workers

BY WILLIAM W. MEHRENS

I am compelled to write to express my outrage concerning your article on the "Davis Bacon" act. The disclaimer at the end of this article stating the National Center for Public Policy Research is a non-partisan organization is akin to the Klu Klux Klan stating they are a white pride organization.

I would suggest that the Portland Observer check the accuracy and facts before printing an article submitted to them by any organization, especially one from a notorious anti-union group such as this is.

If you check your history, this law was passed in 1931, two years after the stock market crash at the depths of the depression. As the federal government was trying to stimulate the economy and put people back to work by investing in public works an interesting development was occurring.

A number of unscrupulous contractors were recruiting any worker they could at the lowest wage they had to pay thereby winning many government projects.

In the debate over the passage of "Davis Bacon" it was pointed out that a contractor that was doing work on a project in New York was paying so little in wages for its workers that the local workforce refused to work. This contractor in turn recruited a labor workforce from the South, predominately from the African American community to perform the project in New York.

The point the Congressman made was that these workers were required to risk their lives every day for a wage that kept them living on the job site in wood and cardboard shacks. This struck this Congressman as a repeat of American History when thousands of slaves lived in similar conditions at many plantations in the South and some justified slavery with the refrain, "at least they have a job."

The cry that I cannot hire as many minorities as I would like because, "I have to pay that in-

flated union wage," and they just don't have the skills necessary without training to pay that inflated wage. This is racism, no matter who says it.

Any contractor may pay a training wage as long as it is a bonifide program with progression that gets the worker the necessary skills to become a journeyman.

Both the federal and state prevailing wage laws are very simple. Construction projects with government funds will not be used to undermine the economic standards of the community where that projects takes place. A contractor's ability to compete is based on their ability to perform, not on how little they pay their employee.

The law requires the government to establish a value for a task performed. Then it requires all contractors offering to perform that task to pay not less than that rate to anyone performing that task, male, female, Hispanic, African American, related to the boss or not.

Those that support the repeal say public contracting should be just like the private sector. The private sector is not required to accept the lowest bid whether the contractor is qualified or not.

During the week of Oct. 10 we conducted our own survey. We called for a quote for a plumber. We called a well-known union shop in Oregon City and an equally well-known, non-union shop in Milwaukie.

We have been told over 80 percent of the new workers entering the workforce in the next decade will be women and minorities. This law says if they perform the task they receive the wage. Why would you want to change that?

Vote No on Ballot Measure 12 to ensure ALL workers on a construction project get paid according to the task performed, not some other innocuous "merit" system.

(William W. Mehrens is the Executive Secretary for the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council of the AFL-CIO.)

## Construction Trade Unions Should Stop the Greed

BY JAMES L. POSEY

It's more than a sick irony that local construction trade unions are crying, "Stop the Greed," to the public in their attempts to stop ballot Measure #12. The measure is intended to repeal the Little Davis-Bacon Act. If any Black member of the community had any doubt about Measure 12 and the need to support it, they should read or re-read the October 5 Portland Observer article titled, "A Double-Edge Sword - Davis-Bacon Finds Minority Opposition."

While the article was mainly factual, I'm more emotional about how these greedy white folks in the unions have categorically and systematically denied Black people economic opportunities in the way of high paying jobs in the construction industry. And they have the nerve to ask others to stop the greed. The truth is local construction unions, with few exceptions, continue a blatant but sophisticated program of keeping Blacks from gaining any significant

entry in the skilled crafts.

Of course, this sad predicament is not a new revelation. However, this situation becomes painfully acute when you realize that this election will provide an opportunity to change a significant pattern of racism and discrimination. Yet Blacks seem confused about how to vote.

Part of the confusion comes from the fact that, because of a history of being builders and laborers, Blacks should naturally relate more to, and automatically support, blue collar labor issues. But one simply has to look around and realize that the present system has been an effective agent in keeping us out. This is true in spite of union efforts to turn the few Blacks that have gained some measure of success into their recruiters/spokespersons. The Little Davis-Bacon law has retained its original intent, which was designed to ensure a nearly all-white, male club in the construction trade unions by limiting training and access to opportunities for Blacks and other minorities. This

has resulted in a nearly a 100 percent quota system for whites males.

The issue is also confusing because the supporters of Measure 12, including the Oregonian newspaper, have rattled off many economic reasons why the general public should vote for the measure. But they seem reluctant to give the full history of how the Act came into existence by outlining its original racist intent. You can only wonder if they are afraid to polarize the issue in a racial context.

Regardless, they need to tell the whole truth so that everyone will know the dubious nature of this very bad law and all the reasons why it needs to be repealed. Even Black advocacy groups seem curiously apathetic about discussing how this law has so greatly harmed economic prospects for Blacks. Black leaders do their constituents a disservice by not being fully informed and aggressively encouraging every African American to vote 'Yes' to end this slave-era law.

But the real paradox surrounding the measure is the general support the Oregonian and many Blacks give to Mary Wendy Roberts who has helped to maintain this racist system for so many years. While Mary will advocate on behalf of migrant workers and gay rights, even Steve Wonder can see that she will ultimately do nothing to jeopardize the support of her union cronies.

Yes, it's a masterful strategy to label their opposition greedy when the unions have gotten obscenely fat at the expense of and to the exclusion of African-Americans and other minorities. This Halloween voting season every responsible person working for equal opportunity, Black or white, ought to end this monster bash by voting yes for Measure 12 on November 8.

James Posey is a small business owner with a background in social work and community activism.

## Politics '94 Critical for Blacks

BY JAMES L. POSEY

Take my word for it, ain't no way Blacks folks can afford to be complacent about their vote on November 8. If Blacks think they have it bad now, just let those ultra conservatives in both parties regain control, and you ain't seen nothing yet. It's not that any one should be overjoyed with the patronizingly political antics of these white liberals. At least they are not trying to whack you off in the light of day.

And if Blacks haven't gotten the message yet, it ain't exactly politically correct these days to be lined up with issues and concerns that empower people of color and the poor. Republicans, starting with Kansas Senator Bob Dole, have been especially unscrupulous and nasty in their attacks on civil rights issues, even the symbolic ones. Newt Gingrich, Ollie North and the rest of the boys, as reflected in the Republican "Contract with American," seem poised to reintroduce slavery.

Make no mistake about it, the Republicans are out to regain the

White House and take control of Congress by any means necessary. What is very sad and disastrous for the country is that those scoundrels are using the oldest trick in the book, divide and conquer. It's clear that they want the middle-class and poor whites to believe that Blacks and other minorities are taking their jobs through affirmative action. They are trying to paint every program that uplifts citizens that are traditionally left out as wasteful and anti-white. "If its good for Blacks and other minorities, than it must threaten the existence of law bidding whites," is their motto.

They have truly built a campaign based on fear and divisiveness. More tragically and in not-so-subtle ways, they are relentlessly trying to reinforce the theory that Blacks are responsible for every major problem facing America, including crime, drugs, welfare, AIDS, you name it. With Republicans, Blacks seem to have two choices: slim and none.

If for one have never wanted to put all my eggs in the Clinton/Democratic basket. But in the current

political environment, what choice do Black people have? And while the Clinton administration deserves lots of criticism, we thank God his administration has slowed the stacking of the Supreme Court with tight-minded conservatives, has supported the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, and has appointed more Black judges than any president in history.

It should be crystal clear that every African-American has a lot to lose if Blacks don't vote in sufficient numbers to waylay these negative assaults to people of color.

On the local political scene, at the invitation of the Black Leadership Conference a few weeks ago, several members of the Black community met with John Kitzhaber, Democratic candidate for Governor. Probably not unlike his previous appearances, he was cordial and listened well to all the concerns. But you could tell that some of the negroes who provided Barbara Roberts with misguided counsel had been courting him pretty heavily.

In fact, you could hardly stand the panting in the room; you know

the ones I'm talking about. Those who always seem to be asking for something they say will help the Black community. But as it turns out, these opportunists are the only ones receiving any real benefit. But we all hope that Kitzhaber, if elected, will be astute enough to see through these scam artists and do exactly the opposite of Barbara Robert's legacy of patronizing Black community issues.

The two politicians in attendance at the Kitzhaber meeting were Avel Gordly and Ed Washington. They both seemed intent on keeping the candidate on track and responsive to community issues. Both Avel and Ed are on the ballot in November. It is clear that they are the most effective politicians serving the Black community. Avel is unopposed, but everyone needs to get out the vote for Ed.

It may be that many Blacks don't know it, but this election is a scary time for Northeast community interest. If we don't all get out and vote, you can be sure that there won't be much of chance of changing the many negative conditions facing our community.

## REMEMBER TO VOTE

VOTING TAKES PLACE ON NOVEMBER 8TH

### Tri-Met

#### Measure NO. 26-13

An Open Letter to The Voters Of Clackamas, Multnomah And Washington Counties:

As Mayors of Gresham, Hillsboro and Portland, we are often faced with situations that demand much of our voters. Rarely do we have a chance to talk to voters about a proposal as positive as expanding our MAX light rail system to serve the corridor between Clackamas County and Vancouver, Washington.

Measure 26-13 is designed to provide the local funding to build a 25 mile light rail line. It will connect MAX and westside light rail with a south-north line from Clackamas County to Vancouver, Washington. Our \$475 million will be matched five to one by dollars contributed by Clark County, the States of Oregon and Washington and the federal government.

Please join us in supporting this important step to help keep growth a positive force for our communities.

• Gussie McRobert, Mayor of Gresham

• Vera Katz, Mayor of Portland

• Gordon Faber, Mayor of Hillsboro

(This information furnished by Julie A. Williamson, Citizens for Light Rail Expansion)

## Make our parks safe!

Parks!  
People!  
Portland!



"Portland's parks and recreation facilities play a fundamental role in making Portland a safer city. Gang violence, drop out rates, and vandalism decline when our youth have positive recreation opportunities. A YES vote on 26-10 is a great investment in our youth, our quality of life and our public safety."



Charles Moose

Vote YES! on #26-10