

LABOR UNDER ATTACK

There is a direct correlation between the stability of union membership and America's middle class. When union membership is growing, the middle class gains financially. Similarly, when union membership decreases, the middle class suffers at the same downward rate.

We know this – and so do those at the highest levels of America's economic strata.

That is why we have witnessed such a determined, unrelenting attack on the rights of working people since we last met in convention four years ago. When a state as sacred in union lore as Michigan can fall under the siren song of those who call themselves “job creators” rather than fall back on generations of family and neighborhood knowledge about how solidarity improved workers' lives, then we must fight back with everything we have to save the middle class and decent jobs.

After years of attacks by the moneyed-interests on work-provided health benefits and retirement security, they have now mounted frontal assaults in the halls of Congress and state capitols. As minimum wage workers march for better pay and working conditions so they can actually provide for their families, we are witnessing countless attempts to eliminate the minimum wage as well as on-the-job health and safety laws in the interest of taking more dollars from the pockets of workers.

On a whole array of issues at the federal, state and local levels, special interest groups and individuals hostile to any kind of viable labor movement are waging an all-out war. Here are just three other examples.

COMP TIME LEGISLATION: Securing a 40-hour work week and gaining overtime for U.S. workers remain among the most important achievements of the American trade union movement. But this basic right has come under attack in the guise of legislation claiming to give workers more flexibility in scheduling their hours. If ever enacted, such a measure could mean a pay cut of up to 59 percent for U.S. hourly workers.

Rather than giving workers more flexibility, comp time would result in mandatory overtime with that overtime becoming less costly to employers. Under such legislation, the bosses would be able to keep workers on the job longer and impose unpredictable and lengthy overtime at no extra cost to them.

It is critically important that trade unionists get the word out that comp time is NOT voluntary. Workers could be coerced into accepting comp time; the employer would have the ultimate authority to determine when workers may utilize accrued comp time.

Needless to say, the comp time scheme undermines the entire concept of a 40-hour workweek.

PAYCHECK DECEPTION: Over the past two decades, business groups seeking to reverse important worker protections have sought to dilute the power of the trade union movement. Once again, they are doing it at both the federal and state levels and are using misleading euphemisms to hide their real goals.

Thanks to the ill-conceived *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision, business groups have been able to flood the political process with a seemingly endless supply of dollars in their attempt to chisel away at the rights of working people all across the nation.

Since the MTD last met in convention, anti-worker governors and legislators in the Midwest have attacked workers' rights. These attacks have come in different forms, from stripping public employees of their collective bargaining rights (successfully in Wisconsin, unsuccessfully in Ohio) to enacting all-out bans on fair share contracts (in Michigan and Indiana).

Organized labor has won a few of these fights, lost a few. And the process continues. In Missouri and other states, corporations are funding efforts to enact paycheck deception, similar to the measure labor beat back in California.

The public needs to know the truth, that paycheck deception laws would create unfair regulations. Organized labor would have to go through burdensome annual bureaucratic hoops to deduct dues from members' paychecks and to use that money to advance workers' interests, such as preventing onerous cuts to Social Security and Medicare.

One of the ironies of all this is that paycheck deception laws would limit the free speech of workers. Meanwhile, the sole basis for overturning decades of campaign finance reforms under the *Citizens United* decision was to give corporations unfettered political speech.

Impartial experts have called these laws what they really are: an all-out attack against working people. As Joshua Rosencranz of the Brennan Center for Justice wrote, “Their transparent motive is not to protect workers, but to silence them by diminishing their collective voice.” Moreover, the so-called “protections” they are saying would ensue already exist under present law.

PROJECT LABOR AGREEMENTS: Project labor agreements (PLAs) have advanced the interests of working people by requiring that government-generated projects adhere to the average wage and benefit standards of a specific area or region.

The concept behind this is clear: Government-generated projects should not be used to debase existing wage standards in any region.

Unfortunately, in Congress and a number of state legislatures, bills have been introduced that would disallow the federal or state governments from utilizing PLAs to protect prevailing wage standards. The train of thought is PLAs cost too much. Without them, governments would save money. Yet, case upon case presented by the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department shows the opposite is true – with PLAs in place, jobs cost less, finish on time or earlier and have less worker injuries.

Yet, earlier this year, North Carolina became the 17th state to enact an anti-PLA law.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Maritime Trades Department, AFL-CIO, its affiliates and its Port Maritime Councils continue their fight at all levels of government to oppose efforts to roll back important worker protections such as overtime, the 40-hour workweek, the right to belong to a union and project labor agreements; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that understanding the severity of these attacks, the MTD, its affiliates and its Port Maritime Councils continue to do all we can to support grassroots and/or educational efforts put forward to strengthen America’s middle class and union members; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MTD, its affiliates and its Port Maritime Councils never tolerate efforts to dull the political power of the trade union movement. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure that American workers maintain the ability to join together to make their voices heard.