

Season's Greetings

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Ugly innards of city charter system

By Dominique Paul Noth
(C) Milwaukee Labor Press

Charter schools are public schools funded by state taxes. They are approved by review committees with little input from local citizens and less control by voters than exists with elected school boards.

The city's charter school system is a rampant demonstration of how to lock out parents and educators with more sophisticated viewpoints. They're getting away with it because of an aura surrounding the term "charter schools." Major player Capital Roundtable is even holding conferences citing the boom in "Private Equity Investing in For-Profit Education" and encouraging the market to get in on the charter school boom taxpayers unknowingly create.

These public schools, rather than rife with fresh ideas as was the hope and excuse, are replete with new perils about how to measure success and how political status and inside clout can reap financial rewards - loopholes spelled out in complicated state legislation.

The movement has been taken over by the same monied interests that propel voucher

schools, that well-meant but sustained proven failure over two decades. And no wonder, since ideas that sound good on paper take years -- from toddler to adolescence -- to measure. And can end up worse for the majority of students.

The city system proves how the current charter fever has become another maddening example of ignorance and belief in a magic wand for education while mainly grabbing the public dollar. Notes sociologist Christopher Bonastia, "The widespread enthusiasm for and rapid proliferation of charter schools also appears to mirror a persistent issue in American education: Expanding new programs before we know if they work and can (or should be) replicated on a larger scale."

He is hardly as unhappy as Marva Herndon, Milwaukee chair of Women Committed to an Informed Community, which pushes the city to require playgrounds at new voucher schools (with mixed success) and tirelessly attacks the city for its lack of transparency in charter approval.

"We are the angry ladies who keep pestering the aldermen



Marva Herndon (right), a champion of educating voters about the greased wheels and trickery in city charter school approval, also advocates for playgrounds at voucher schools. She was joined in that effort last summer by Nikiya Harris, now a state senator.

with letters and at hearings about caring about children's circumstances," said Herndon. "We are actually not against either vouchers or charters. What put us on this mission was how the city was sliding these schools in, often into failing buildings, and there was no money for city residents. They are watering down building codes and endangering the physical and mental health of kids in this rush."

Republicans lawmakers such as Dale Schultz also worry about this rush to the charter movement. He blocked a new statewide authorizing agency last year for fear that would simply create yet another expensive untested school district for state taxpayers without clear returns.

"Before we rush to blow the cap off of charter schools, let's fully understand what the impact will be, especially on our rural

schools," said Schultz "Most of the school boards are just incensed about this. It does take control away from local communities."

Herndon's outrage bubbles over Northpoint Lighthouse, 4200 W. Douglas Ave., a city charter her group vehemently objected to because its \$13,000 warehouse building abuts an old rail-line on ground never submitted for environmental testing.

Despite her hard facts, the city didn't stop the deal. It still got the votes to open. She is not alone in thinking the fix was in.

"So now children are going to school in an old steel processing plant that had never been tested for ground pollution or suitability for human habitation," said Herndon. "These games make us show up at every hearing until someone listens."

Political power plays muscle games at the city where Common Council President Willie Hines is "deeply involved in charter cronyism" and controls influential committee assignments that none of his fellow African American aldermen dare buck - yet it is their districts dominated by this rush to voucher and charter approval.

Charters continued Page 12

Steering taxpayers to listen!



MATC teacher and devoted bus rider Jim Carpenter, backed by signs and other speakers, added to moving testimony about the need for committed public transit funding. **Story on Page 2.**

Slicing up Palermo muddle

By Dominique Paul Noth
Labor Press Editor

On November 15 at a packed People's Gala in the UWM Union, Voces de la Frontera honored the determination of the Palermo workers seeking a union. The working families and their children crowded the stage in joy at the honor and the hope. Rumors swept the hall that a crucial decision on membership for a union election could emanate from the National Labor Relations Board regional office before Thanksgiving.

The key for the Palermo Workers Union effort was whether the 80 or so workers fired by Palermo would be allowed to vote as part of the new union, which would signal likely victory whatever future legal issues might face some of these work-

Despite what you've read, workers taking bites out of pizza maker.

ers. In fact, while the community boiled with rumors they were all illegal, many were not. Most said they were eager for a union and a day in court even if down the road some might face deportation under the byzantine rules the US system has fostered.

The issue was whether the Palermo company, well connect-

ed to the community power base, could successfully exclude the fired from a union election vote because of immigration law, whether it had hid within that law to prevent a union, and whether in a future union vote it could include the replacement workers hired through temporary agencies who would likely out of self-interest vote the company's way against a union.

A week later, the regional

Palermo continued Page 9

Holiday Edition

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- Domestic Abuse - Page 4
- Hostess, pie in face of workers - Page 5
- Workers unite - no waiting! - Pages 11, 16

Will public hear wheels coming off busses?

By Dominique Paul Noth
Labor Press Editor

Now fifty and a public transit enthusiast since her student days at Marquette, striding to the mike at Washington Park Senior Center with backpack and energy, the teacher described how regularly riding the bus kept her energized and "in great shape," provided time to grade papers and chances to meet the great so-called ordinary people in the city she loves. She summed up: "A healthy city requires a healthy system for everyone to move from place to place."

Using a three-pronged walker to get to the podium, another devoted bus-riding worker described how her livelihood depended on bus routes, which were being reduced. A blind worker recalled how in 1972 before the cuts he could travel multiple counties while today getting anywhere required hours of effort. A student wondered why GPS wasn't employed to communicate and cut down on cold corner waiting times.

A bus driver, Angela Walker of ATU, noted that she ended her routes at 2 a.m. "and then I unload my bike from the bus to get home." Randy Crump, a leader in the black community and a champion for minority employment, described how often his charges couldn't get to good jobs he found "because they couldn't get there" because the bus stops keep diminishing and moving further away from the promising careers.

A retiree worried about the aftermath sadness and isolation imposed by government policy after a lifetime of work. "How will I shop? How will I visit family?"

There's a safety issue, noted another senior -- "people who



Officials John Weishan, Sandy Pasch and Chris Larson (left to right) chat as they get ready for the listening session on the community's public transit crisis.

know they shouldn't drive, but that doesn't mean older folks enjoy living on the edge -- we just haven't given them a bus system to think in any other way."

A CEO spoke for his colleagues about how "the bulk of my turnaround" in good staff is when they find another job "not for money but for a faster way to work" than the extra hours the current bus system requires.

Good jobs seem to have been deliberately moved to other counties beyond the current bus routes. And rather than rant about the racism inherent in that, Baptist minister Willie Brisco brought down the house by saying, "Hey, we might even want to live in Waukesha if we could get there."

They and dozens who spoke from a rotating crowd of about 150 really just wanted officials in power to hear and understand their loss and demands, which was the point of the Dec. 1 listening session. It was care for quality of life, noted one speaker

-- and for the new Democratic leader of the state Senate, Chris Larson, and two key Assembly leaders in attendance, Jon Richards and Sandy Pasch.

Note who wasn't there? The highway-loving Republicans in the majority, too busy trying to explain away those gathering clouds of wasted money, job opportunities lost in opposing trains and dumping largesse on regional roads that few have asked for.

Years ago, regular citizens here knew one big step of what was needed when they voted in an advisory referendum - turned down by tax-fearing leaders - for a dedicated source of funding for transit in the form of a sliver of a penny sales tax - "more important," noted one angry speaker, "than a baseball park or the Bradley Center."

The room knew the other part of the solution -- 10% support from the state, an idea whose time is long past but activists say must now get the attention of a legislative body that pretends to care about more employment.



Supervisors Jason Haas and Russell Stamper III absorb the often painful stories.

But that, said one agitated activist, is going to require outrage and protest, "like a bus and bike invasion of Madison."

Sponsors of the listening session were the ACLU, Citizen Action, Disability Rights, African American Roundtable, ATU Local 998, Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin, Independence First, MICA, Midwest Environmental Advocates, Milwaukee Transit Riders Union, 9to5, Wisconsin Interfaith Power and Light, and Volunteers of America of Wisconsin.



Loaded with stories and job facts, a panel prepares to open the bus discussion.



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Why credit unions attack big banks

Angry at what it regards as deliberate misstatement to artificially inflate competitive rationale by Wisconsin's banks, the state's credit unions are going full tilt after the Wisconsin Bankers Association.

This is not just an "inside the financial crust" dispute since credit unions by law must keep money in their communities and big banks command more money and lobbying power. Yet it is credit unions that saved Wisconsin consumers \$201 million in 2011 without any taxpayer bailout, noted Brett A. Thompson, CEO of the Wisconsin Credit Union League.

He wants the public not just the financial sector involved in the discussion "because it's their money." He notes his members face far greater regulation than banks, a cap on business lending that applies only to credit unions, and "the inability to raise capital by issuing stock, which only banks can do."

"What's more, credit unions pay all the same taxes banks pay -- except corporate tax, which more than 80 Wisconsin banks don't pay either."

Credit unions have only that corporate tax exemption because consumers, not shareholders, are beneficiaries of credit unions' earnings. "Banks just don't like the fact that credit unions have become more successful," added Thompson.

Master lock on resilience

One of the main speakers, Mayor Tom Barrett, noted it was also a celebration of "a company that knows the road to economic recovery - we have to make more stuff."

That was why earlier this year President Obama made Milwaukee's vast Master Lock facility in the inner city his main stop to promote "insourcing." That's why Barrett and another main speaker, Rep. Gwen Moore, praised Master Lock CEO John Heppner and chief executive Bob Rice for seeing the value in its turn from Asian outsourcing to Milwaukee dedication and productivity.

At a time, both speakers and others noted December 1, when many companies would have looked to the cheapest neighbor if they had to leave China, pursuing the lowest wage environment possible, Master Lock weighed the dedication and savings here and is now spending to bring production back.

Even the UAW, already hip deep in hard negotiations for a new contract to succeed the one that ends in March, credited the company's direction. "Their faith in our work has steered product exiting China back to our facility," said one UAW leader.

This is why more than 150 persons -- local and UAW members and families, community leaders and public officials -- responded to a celebratory dinner invitation from the Master Lock UAW Local 469 followed by dancing in the Wyndham Hotel ballroom.

"There was a time when I didn't think we'd be here," conceded local president Mike Bink in his talk, but pointing out that against those old odds and expectations, Master Lock production in Milwaukee is growing.

This was the 75th anniversary of the local charter, a milestone once unlikely. But now -- "thanks to the company's recognition of your work," said Moore -- Master Lock is adding millions of dollars in new equipment to add product lines here. The machinery comes first, but the job numbers likely follow, though in a new computerized age the worker numbers may not match the past when Milwaukee manufacturing assembly lines



State AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Stephanie Bloomingdale with UAW international representatives Tony Rainey (center) and John Drew. Below: UAW Local 469 President Mike Bink (right) with Guide Mark Wieseke.



and other mass businesses such as tanning plants and mechanical shops dominated the Midwest economy.

UAW's John Drew, a hyper-active presence in promoting his workers and political activity as international representative, also demonstrated his gift for history in his speech. The real story, he noted, was not only about Master Lock but resonant reminders over decades of how workers organized to do what they could not do alone and thus boosted the economy.

There was a slight irony - since this dinner was next to the

last labor event to be held at the unionized Wyndham Hotel opposite Mitchell Field. Reports are the hotel and adjacent facilities will be shuttered and probably razed by a new property owner in late December.

As detailed last month in Labor Press, some 63 Workers United members are looking for other work though a number of union groups had long delighted in the size of the ballroom and the food quality, set up for buffet service this time.

The celebration and its sponsors also reminded attendees of what a dynamic community help Local 469 has been over the years.

It continues to be involved in St. Benedict the Moor's meal programs, the Ronald McDonald House, the Next Door Foundation, the Salvation Army and other causes. The local was also one of the early responders to the victims of Hurricane Sandy.

Good union jobs do seem to create good neighbors.

Labor Press will take a hiatus in January to plan some complicated graphics, marketing and content changes.

The monthly home-delivered newspaper will return in February. New stories will continue to be posted at our online portal, milwaukeeelabor.org. There events are updated, newspapers are archived on a one-month delay, additional information for activists is included in our Take Action section and special stories and commentary responsive to the 24/7 news cycle continue to emerge. So make us your home page and help the improvements along.


Part of the changes explored are how to take better advantage of the enormous growth in our online community and reputation. Add your comments to action@milwaukeeelabor.org Visit milwaukeeelabor.org and stay tuned.

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Happy Holidays

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Among the crowd of guests were AFT Local 212 President Michael Rosen and his COPE leader Luz Sosa.

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Most caring, least protected – America’s legions of domestics

Domestic workers, such as caregivers and nannies, may make all forms of other work possible given the high level of women in the workplace and the change to two income households becoming almost a standard of American worklife. So they play an increasingly significant role in the US economy though there is limited opportunity to organize into influential unions.

Thus on average, as revealed in a new national study now available online in the Take

Action section of milwaukeeelabor.org, domestic workers earn little more than minimum wage and few receive benefits like Social Security, health insurance or paid sick days.

Conducted by the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and the Center for Urban Economic Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago, the study offers a startling and provocative look into the often-invisible world of domestic workers.

Based on interviews with

2,086 workers across the country, researchers found domestic workers face serious financial hardships and have little control over their working conditions.

As a critical part of the US labor force, domestic workers help thousands of working families by enabling them to focus on their jobs. Yet, they are often paid well below the level needed to adequately support their own families. Forty percent of workers report having paid some of their essential bills late, thus facing penalties, and 23% are

unable to save any money for the future. The report is also full of tales of live-in nannies and other domestics promised one level of pay only to be paid far less and even sleep on the floor with no recourse. The lack of legal protections for domestic workers allows systemic substandard pay and conditions.

Domestic workers are excluded from federal and most states' minimum wage laws, as well as by unemployment insurance, anti-discrimination and workers' compensation laws. They also are excluded from the right to organize and collectively bargain for better wages and working conditions.

Additionally, the majority of domestic workers are women of color and immigrants, a number of whom are undocumented. Researchers found wages differ significantly across ethnicity and immigration status.

Ai-jen Poo, the director of NDWA, said, "We need 21st century policies that value the dignity of domestic work."

The study calls for the end of the exclusion of domestic workers from labor laws, including state minimum wage laws and workers' compensation.

Without access to collective bargaining and legal protections, domestic workers remain vulnerable in today's workplaces.

However, nannies, household cleaners and other domestic workers both in the United States and abroad have organized for years to raise labor standards and improve working conditions. New York became the first state in 2010 to legislate a Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, granting overtime pay and other legal rights. Today, domestic workers around the nation are continuing to advocate for similar laws in other states.

In an effort to help raise labor standards for all working people, the AFL-CIO formed a national partnership with the National Domestic Workers Alliance in 2011. Through advocacy and organizing at both the local and state level, domestic workers are joining together with the union movement to help build power for working families.

Read the entire report online in the milwaukeeelabor.org Take Action section: "Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work."

Green Bay squad builds playground for county and United Way



United Way of Greater Milwaukee and many local union volunteers got some notable company building a playground here for children. The Hometown Huddle was joined by members of the Green Bay Packers who took the day to hammer, bolt and assemble a playground for elementary school students. Among the pro football players who joined United Way volunteers and Milwaukee County AFSCME union workers were Brandon Bostick, B.J. Coleman, Andrew Datko and Greg Van Roten.

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Both workers, public got creamed by Hostess

By **Dominique Paul Noth**
Labor Press Editor

On November 29 a bankruptcy judge gave 19 Hostess execs their \$1.8 million bonus sendoff for working so hard to close the company - and then helped them throw 18,000 employees out of work just in time for Christmas, with an end to wages, retirement plans, health benefits but with expectations that under regulations federal taxpayers will be forced to pay radically reduced pensions.

Quite typically and falsely, the public and the media immediately blamed the unions. The TV anchors barely stopped to consider how families thrown out in the cold would continue. All the consumers could talk about was - what's happening to our cupcakes?

Blame the workers? The facts run counter. Turns out this was corporate self-immolation, another case of Wall Street hedge fund managers who ran the company into bankruptcy -- for a second time! It was a replay of the Bain approach to turnaround. It topped not with cream but something quite slimy the six decades of broken promises to a

workforce that had often agreed to harsh terms and pay cutbacks to keep the company going, without ever seeing the savings rolled back into improvements or into keeping a talented workforce. Instead the executives were sprinkled with bonuses.

So this November the bakers union finally had it with bad management that squeezed every cent out of Hostess for eight years, and had hired friends with no experience in the baking industry and little marketing savvy. Now it is that management that hopes to use a PR hammer to pound the media into blaming unions protecting their weakest workers -- though it was not the stubbornness of the workers but the corporate ineptitude that propelled the demise.

It's not a total disaster for the iconic Hostess name, just for the workers, since middlemen companies are scrambling to get the Twinkies brand and other memorable products the public has slowed in buying but never stopped loving. There may even be advertising life left in coconut sprinkled goodies, raspberry filled cupcakes and those famous rubbery cream-filled sponge concoctions (actually

they are filled with cellulose gum) that have become an American snack institution. Not just Twinkies but Ding-Dongs and Ho-Hos will be snapped up in the bargain-basement bankruptcy sale of assets. It's just the people who faithfully made them who will be dumped.

Worse, in TV news reports it is these workers criticized by the misguided and rather chubby street interviewed who ask why they couldn't just bend over and accept the race to the bottom. Those damn unions!

As loved as Hostess may be in memory, that was certainly not true in sales, which have been sagging, or in image, which has gone into the health dumpster. Ask any concerned parent.

Hostess failed to respond to the growing concern for nutritious foods, while other snack companies were more nimble in both ingredients and marketing.

In the closing of Hostess Brands much of the media ignored that the company had actually forced their largest union, the Teamsters, to capitulate to massive salary cuts. It was the other 30% of their workforce - the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union - that went on strike a few weeks before the final bankruptcy, even

then knowing that management and the media would blame them.

A stroll through history, a look at how the company wasted big savings from previous union wage cuts to keep the company going through bankruptcy, better explains why the bakery union could no longer believe the promises. When you look at the final devastating offer you understand even further.

There was a brief glimmer around Thanksgiving when the bankruptcy judge discovered, to his clear amazement, that management had never attempted mediation with the union and ordered federal intervention. But management shut that down quickly and the liquidation unfolded as required by law.

Beyond inept management and changing American tastes, Hostess had become something of a national joke. Ask any modern parent and they describe Twinkies and Ding-Dong devotees as symbols of America's obesity meter.

If you stuff them down, you are going to need great health care and an excellent dentist. Twinkies have wonderful shelf-life in a hurricane, a Sandy survivor told me, "but my kids should eat them only in desperate hunger - a cheeseburger is healthier."

Larger competitors inundat-

ed supermarket shelves with an array of new snacks and variations catering not just to the health craze but to the nutrition conscious. Some even found a way to preach moderation. Not Hostess. It couldn't change ingredients, image or appeal to stuffing it down. It became the classic purveyor of empty calories: Twinkies with 150 calories and 4.5 grams of fat, a filled chocolate Ding Dong 368 calories and 19.4 grams of fat.

CEO Gregory Rayburn conceded that sales volume was down in recent years, though brand appeal still produced \$2.5 billion in revenue a year. That inadvertently revealed the truth. Slashing \$25 million from union pensions and 17 cents from wages was harsh but a feeble excuse to blame the workers for closing a company with such revenue potential. Two bankruptcies in eight years - and golden parachutes for ineffectual executives - are more to the point.

The lasting lesson of this too typical American experience will be how the workers respond to unfair treatment from both the company and the public. Expect them to show strength and spirit - and fight for new opportunities and better treatment in the future. That, not Twinkies, is the true American brand.

State health facts from AFL-CIO

Just how does Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid grow the local economy? The AFL-CIO has created new drop-down fact sheets online at aflcio.org/Get-Involved/Protect-Our-Future/State-by-State-Impact-of-Federal-Budget-Debate.

Click on your state from the map. The AFL-CIO believes that factual ammunition is what people need now to understand the consequences of this sometimes murky D.C. debate.

The Wisconsin fact sheet - which has been made available in the Take Action section of milwaukeelabor.org - reveals some astounding economic plusses.

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid combined deliver \$28.8 billion per year into Wisconsin's economy.

1,061,501 Wisconsinites receive monthly Social Security checks, including 146,516 with disabilities and 77,143 children.

881,861 Wisconsinites get their health care coverage from Medicare.

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Fix Debt blitz hopes to bamboozle citizenry

Maybe you've heard of the CEO campaign to "Fix the Debt." Maybe you've seen some of their endless TV commercials, including the one that looks like that commie scare tactics from the 1950s with a Chinese teacher boasting to a classroom of how his country will soon own America because of all of our fear of the foreign percentage of our national debt.

Or the ludicrous one with an elderly couple at their computer screen frightened to death about the impending higher tax rate on their beloved "dividends" - meaning capital gains, hardly a scene most Americans ever go through since you've got to be real rich to worry about the minimal impact.

Has the election really taught the public nothing, or is it just the advertising geniuses who keep failing to learn? This is more of the same tactic of frightening US citizens into thinking regulation is bad and that the average Joe has no power except hatred to attack.

With a \$60 million war chest and the blessing of more than 80 CEOs of America's biggest corporations, "Fix the Debt" is passing itself off as a reasoned call for compromise to save the nation from economic disaster. Even respected outlets -- such as Marquette University's Mike Gousha with a Sunday talk show -- and even respected political leaders from both parties speak about the real problems of increased debt (and it's certainly a real concern) but are duped into looking only shallowly into who is funding this movement and how the defect is a side-show of the nation's real need: more jobs and a stronger economy to create a true frugal atmosphere to attack the debt.

Too many of the companies behind Fix the Debt stand to gain \$134 billion from one of the tax breaks they are promoting. Not just any tax break, mind you, but a new tax incentive for corporations to send jobs overseas.

A new report from the Institute for Policy Studies (ISP) warns that Fix the Debt is a Trojan horse concealing massive corporate tax breaks that would make our debt situation much worse.

Peel away the slick PR and here's what Fix the Debt really is, the ISP points out -- a powerful corporate lobby using the deficit as an excuse to sneak through costly corporate tax breaks, while at the same time cutting Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Another new study, "Un-Shared Sacrifice: How 'Fix the Debt' Companies Buy Washington Influence & Rig the Game," from the Public Campaign, added these details:

- The 95 companies that make up the "Fix the Debt" coalition have spent nearly \$1 billion over the past four years on lobbying and campaign contributions.
- Twenty-two publicly traded companies that are members of the coalition have spent more on lobbying in the past three years than they have on taxes.
- General Electric (GE) is the top influence-spender of these companies. Since 2009, GE, its CEO and political action committee (PAC) have spent a combined \$112 million on lobbying and campaign contributions.
- The influence peddling is bipartisan. Fifty-seven percent of the contributions spent by the CEOs and PACs of these companies goes to Republicans and 43% goes to Democrats.

- Also according to the separate IPS report:
- The 63 Fix the Debt companies that are publicly held stand to gain as much as \$134 billion in windfalls if Congress approves one of their main proposals -- a "territorial tax system." Under this system, companies would not have to pay federal income taxes on foreign earnings when they bring the profits back to the United States.
 - The CEOs backing Fix the Debt personally received a combined total of \$41 million in savings last year, thanks to the Bush-era tax cuts. The top CEO beneficiary of the Bush tax cuts in 2011, Leon Black of Apollo Global Management, saved \$9.9 million on the Bush tax cuts. The private equity fund leader reaped \$215 million in taxable income last year just from invested stock.
 - Of the 63 Fix the Debt CEOs at publicly held firms, 24 received more in compensation last year than their corporations paid in federal corporate income taxes. All but six of these firms reported US profits last year.

Who prepared these reports? Is this from some violently radical research groups that hate Republicans? Hardly.

Public Campaign is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to sweeping campaign reform affecting policies in both parties.

IPS is a community of public scholars and organizers linking peace, justice, and the environment globally as well as in the US.

It made its arguments against the mass TV ad campaign by Fix the Debt in a scholarly analysis published in newspapers November 14. -- D.P.N.

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Exposer of hate focuses on lives saved

By **Dominique Paul Noth**
Labor Press Editor

There was a dynamic connection between the keynote speaker Dec. 6 and the Sikh community honored for exemplary tolerance at the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee's annual luncheon.

I caught up with the speaker the day before outside his Milwaukee hotel, Richard Cohen, president of the prestigious Southern Poverty Law Center. We discussed the curious media discrepancy he constantly lives with: Running a vital research and advisory center exposing hate groups and helping the public and law enforcement cope - and yet mainly in national headlines when some serial madness erupts and it turns out his files contain a deep record of the perpetrators that the courts didn't or couldn't act upon.

I reminded him of the recent tragedy connected with the NFL, a player who killed the mother of his baby and then committed suicide before his team-mates - and how it later turned out that police had been called in to a domestic disturbance but found no grounds to act. This was not a case Cohen's center was involved in, but recently the background of an Alaskan serial killer came from his files. Time and again, from bombings to mass shootings inexplicable to the public, SPLC has been called on by media and law enforcement to open our understanding. Inevitably, exposing hate has led to attacks that he is focused on right-wing group hate, but the history reveals a disturbing link between all sorts of hate speech and violence, which right now does center more on certain ideologies. Attacking SPLC for devoted research is the classic case of needing but trying to strangle the messenger.

"There have been so many cases I can no longer keep track," Cohen said during our conversation.

Yet by nature he is upbeat, curious about others and an encyclopedia of challenges to our social peace, from bullying to gang violence to eruptions of more difficult to determine circumstance.

When killings of police officers erupted in the South, it was his SPLC that provided information to the police and public. The Sikh temple shooter, who will not be named in this story, was not just "in the center's files," he had been for a decade. He was even featured in a video shared for free with law enforcement about neo-Nazi groups, their music and hate culture. That research was one reason so much was known quickly about him.

That Oak Creek mass shooting shocked the nation but also touched the world because of the dignity and tolerance with which



Richard Cohen during an interview in a downtown Milwaukee bar. the Sikhs responded to such a horrifying event, a key reason the religious group was honored at this luncheon.

Cohen in our talk was clearly proud of Wisconsin's choice of Tammy Baldwin as new senator, but not because he knows her, but because attacks on the LBGT community are a big part of his work. "One of our first documentaries was about a Wisconsin case," he recalled - an anti-bullying incident at public schools in which he recalls Baldwin also spoke out in the US House.

His civil rights organization pioneers the use of litigation, education and other means to fight hate and bigotry. It is known internationally for tracking and exposing hate groups, work that is dangerous and important - but ever more important in a country that prides itself on free speech but needs to be alert to the lurking excess.

Some might find it depressing that all this good work only gets prominent headlines after carnage, after extremist attitudes and dangerous tendencies toward violence the center has long exposed finally erupts. Doesn't Cohen ever get discouraged about being hailed

for good work in the aftermath of horror.

"I look at the flip side," he said, "how many lives of people and law officers our projects have helped save." And that also is quite a story, since the center's Teaching Tolerance program provides free information and training tool videos to combat hate groups and prepare law enforcement and communities. "Teaching Tolerance has become a vital part of our work," Cohen said.

He shared a story - a police chief whose officer son was killed on duty by members of an extremist group and then agreed to host a training video. Cohen pulled out his smart phone to share a letter from another officer who credits seeing that video with saving his life in a hostile situation.

That's why Cohen's belief in his work and enthusiasm seem boundless even after two and a half troubling decades. "It is getting better and it does make a difference," he said.

Other notable awards given out at the Interfaith Conference:

The Frank Zeidler Award (named after Milwaukee's legendary mayor) went to Lakshmi Bharadwaj, UWM professor (emeritus) and longtime Interfaith board member from the Hindu Temple of Wisconsin.

Rev. Herbert Huebschmann Urban Ministry Award - Recipient is Tikun Ha-Ir of Milwaukee, an independent organization whose Jewish name translates as "repair of the city" and whose mission is "to encourage the Jewish community to build a more just Milwaukee through study, action and civic engagement."

Youth Leadership Award - Recipient group is Ma'ruf, a Muslim organization that advocates social justice by serving individuals, families, and communities in need.

Mark Rohlfing Memorial Award - Honoree is Dr. Francine Feinberg, who retired as executive director of Meta House.



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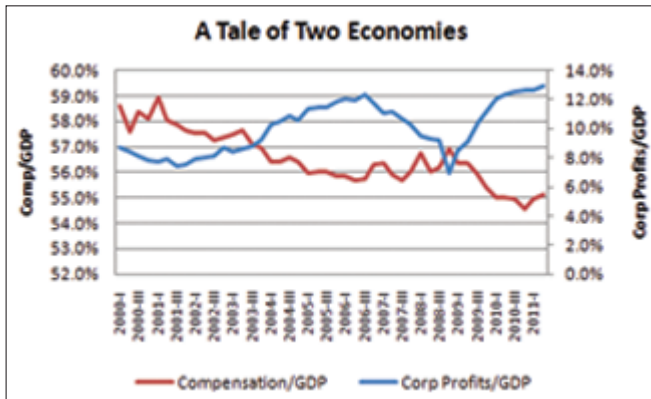
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Workers star at Voces gala



ENTER THE DRAGON – Jared Bernstein is an economist with a penetrating understanding of US data. But he also has a sense of humor. The former chief economist for Vice President Joe Biden now a busy online blogger and TV commentator saw a dragon (below) in a recent technical chart (above). It devastatingly revealed the gap between the income of the very rich and the stagnant and even falling wages despite increased productivity of the workers. So he has added wings and teeth to make it clear just how this gap is eating the economy alive.



Children crowded the UWM Union stage to join their mothers and fathers honored for their fight for union rights at Palermo Villa's assembly factory. Top left, a member of the workers got emotional as he accepted the honor on behalf of the much maligned group. LEFT: **Other honorees** got applause as well, including the legal duo that successfully got a federal court to redraw the Milwaukee Latino district maps – and Peter Earle and Jackye Boynton (left) still could make waves because of hidden emails the GOP should have shared. Jim and Jeanne Cusak (bottom) were also honored for their contributions to the Sanctuary movement.



BELOW: The workers kids understandably squirmed during the long speeches, but that was okay. The audience took more pleasure in watching their antics than the speeches.



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Happy Holidays

FROM

AFSCME Council 48
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Palermo

From Page 1

office of the National Labor Relations Board did offer the parties a brief written summary and then, in a letter distributed December 3, conveyed a more formal partial dismissal of one key issue.

In sum it found merit in the workers' complaint that the company had violated labor laws -- unlawfully threatening at least half a dozen employees with job loss if they went out on strike and then refusing to let them back once replaced.

But it also did not find evidence of Palermo misbehavior on the charge that made the big headlines - using immigration law to impede a unionizing effort, which would be illegal.

The regional director, Irving Gottschalk, did not find "a preponderance of evidence" that the company had violated the workers' protected labor rights, so it supported the company's position that, tardy or not, it was within immigration law in ousting 75 workers.

But the union's lawyer, Richard Saks, disagreed. As he told Labor Press November 30, Palermo Workers Union will appeal the NLRB finding, suggesting he did see evidence of anti-union campaigning by the company in the firings. The process could take weeks and meanwhile the company is negotiating on related violations and dealing with the increasing cost of a national boycott of its frozen pizza.

Saks points out that ICE sent the company a letter suspending interest in "suspect documents" - perhaps because it knew there was a union campaign underway, which could come out in future testimony - and only after that did Palermo mail letters out firing workers. He sees problems with the accelerated pace of replacing workers using immigration law as a reason.

If you are confused about this, join the local media. Except for a respectable report by Georgia Pabst in JS online, the business newspapers fudged it, one saying the ruling "vindicated" the company, another saying the workers were "properly" fired. It was careless reportage that did not understand the nuances of the law.

The NLRB deals with labor law process and determinative evidence -- not with immigration law and final interpretation. Finding insufficient evidence that the company was retaliating for the employees' union effort is not the same as interpreting immigration law or closing the door to appeals that the evidence shows something else, which is what Saks will argue.

Spokesmen for Voces sure think that something else was going on and have a timeline to pursue the complaint. Currently the company is in negotiations

that could force an open admission it was engaged in an anti-union campaign. The company will likely reinstate some workers fired for engaging in union activity because it has been caught in six to nine obvious illegal firings not covered in the partial NLRB dismissal - something company spokesmen called a "minor infraction," an excuse laughable to people who lost their jobs for engaging in protected activity. But any settlement will probably wait until the larger legal appeal of the union election makeup.

Last August CEO Giacomina Falluca sought ways to resolve the dispute and the national boycott against the frozen pizza, even seeking a meeting with AFL-CIO leader Richard Trumka. Recent Labor Press interviews suggest his efforts were shot down by the notorious national union busting law firm, Jackson Lewis, hired to develop a more aggressive strategy.

The strategy now is fashioned around playing up the company's public relations power and political angles and claiming the company would welcome a union, because it legally must, while seeking through lawyers to shape the election membership so a union can't win.

The strategy includes slamming Voces for stirring up media attention while dodging questions about what Palermo knew or didn't about hiring workers it shouldn't.

Activists in the community are also angered at community leaders who say they support worker rights but are clearly caught between the Palermo deep pockets and what human instincts reveal is going on.

They cite County Executive Chris Abele op-ed supporting the company's reputation as a charitable leader, which it is (though apparently not in this case). They cite Mayor Tom Barrett, after the NLRB indicated it would exclude 75 workers from the election vote, belatedly supporting the union election vote, knowing full well that without these bodies the company would probably win.

One-sided media reporting also leaves the community confused, sympathetic with the workers and understandably muddled about the legalities.

In D.C., people connected to ICE (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which does interpret our complex immigration laws) would not speak on the record but warned inquirers not to be so fast to judge. "No one is off the hook," one told me, referring to both the company, which has been investigated on its hiring practices by ICE for more than four years, and the activists who want a union.

"The activists want our laws reformed and will say a lot to get that done," he said. "The compa-



Atty. Richard Saks

ny tells you they were once immigrants themselves and would be the last people to be lawbreakers. But you know, sometimes they are the first because they are anxious to look the other way."

As if talking to a child and off the record, he explained that the NLRB decision -- that there was not enough proof that the company tried to use immigration rules to stop workers who wanted a union -- doesn't mean they didn't do so. Or that they did. No one wants to judge without evidence, "but this sort of tug of war goes to the company without further action," he said.

Now there is further action, according to Saks, the lawyer for the Palermo Workers Union, which is supported by the USW. He won honors from Voces at the gala but in a different context. It was for his civil rights victory with James Hall of the NAACP in the Voter ID rebuff at the

courts.

Another contact in D.C. speaking off the record pointed out that "what seems new to Milwaukee is hardly new to us." In fact, ICE history is full of cases of companies who wanted good workers and accepted them despite uncertain papers, only later to learn they faced enormous fines for such actions. One response is to blame the workers for clever forgery and fire them hoping to escape fines.

No one in authority is saying that is what happened here. Few speculate on how the legalities will unfold. But there remains a cloud of suspicion plus maneuvers by the company to get out from under a national battle about humanity it knows it is losing.

The Voces gala remains powerful in retrospect. Even with mixed results and temporary setbacks, Voces has strong reason to celebrate and keep trucking. The Nov. 6 election indicated it has turned the Latino community into a political powerhouse and its volunteers, supporters and youth movement are to be cherished.

Not just the workers received awards. So did attorneys Peter Earle and Jackye Boynton for leading the legal charge that made a federal court panel redraw the GOP redistricting maps in Latino Milwaukee.

Honored as well were workers rights center lawyer Israel

Ramon, Equality Wisconsin pioneer Ray Vahey, Sanctuary movement volunteers Jeanne and Jim Cusak (he's a retired carpenter widely known as a labor activist), the youth leaders who now dominate Voces and "new Americans" who are joining the cause with their citizenship papers proudly on parade.

SEE PAGE 10 FOR MORE BOBO

The dynamic keynote speaker for the event, Kim Bobo, founder and leader of Interfaith Worker Justice, tied it all together with biblical quotes, the need for ethical businesses, the fight against wage theft and the reasons all of us must "lift our arms together" to succeed. Hundreds in the room followed her instructions and did just that.

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There are honest-to-gosh people under that Social Security debate

Some 55.4 million Americans across the United States receive monthly Social Security checks, including 8.6 million workers with disabilities and 4.4 million children. A total of 48.7 million Americans get their health care coverage from Medicare. 64.4 million Americans get their health care coverage from Medicaid, including 29.8 million children and 4.2 million seniors.

These may only be numbers on the table to negotiators in D.C. But they are human beings whose lives and living conditions hang in the balance. That is the distinction that has to be at the front of the mind when members of Congress make decisions on the budget debate, whether during the lame-duck session until the end of 2012 or in the new Congress.

What worries most Americans is that a Republican Party that lost its way campaigning against basic benefits may continue its obstinacy.

Clearly the White House, eager for a deal, is going to face a ton of misdirection and enormous pressure from millionaires and billionaires who will argue that changing benefits, raising the age or similar heavy-handed gimmicks are essential to get the budget in line. What they are really saying is cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid in order to continue tax giveaways for the richest 2%.

Working families thought they had addressed that in a ringing vote Nov. 6, but here we go again.

-- D.P.N.

Bobo stresses business ethics

As founder and longtime leader of Interfaith Worker Justice, plus author of a famous book exposing the endemic use of wage theft to rob workers of just pay, Kim Bobo has a knack of combining biblical references with social activism on behalf of labor causes.

She did it notably as keynote speaker at the Voces de la Frontera People's Gala November 15, getting the large crowd to raise hands almost in prayer over the need to lift each other up.

But one of her admonishments to the labor community was that, aside from embracing religious leaders and the immigrant community as partners, they must pursue working with ethical businesses. She sees that as a key, and unions should too, she emphasized in both speech and conversations.

After all, as union staffs routinely explain to callers, unions don't create jobs. Businesses and governmental units do. The effort of educating business leaders why union workers are better often butts against well-funded campaigns and outright myths. It requires facts and face-to-face explaining how union workers are better, more productive, happier - and pay off in productivity and experience for the bottom line.

Here are excerpts from Bobo's remarks: *To win the fights ahead, we need to identify and build ties with ethical business leaders.*

Can our congregations find ethical business leaders who will speak out on minimum wage, paid sick days and wage theft? Tompkins County Workers Center (a noted nonprofit in Ithica, N.Y.) has a Living Wage Certification



On Bobo's command, three hundred guests at the UWM Union dinner raised their hands in a symbolic solidarity gesture of holding progressive causes up.



Ethical values in supporting workers was a central theme for keynote speaker Kim Bobo.

program that has about 100 businesses in it.

Every wage theft campaign we've won has included ethical business leaders speaking in favor of leveling the playing field.

We need to find, support and recognize ethical business leaders. Business voice will be critical for immigration reform. So Voces -- you in this room. You are the diverse coalition we need to change the nation. Build and support diverse coalitions. (The message was to find the ethical businesses that will support such coalitions.)

The only way to stay in the fight for the long run, is to lift arms together. We must hold up one another's arms when we get weary. Moses couldn't keep his arms raised by himself. Aaron and Hur had to help.

Obama can't do it by himself. FDR used to say, "Make me do it." We need to push up Obama's arms, so he can provide the leadership we need him to offer.

Labor can't do it alone. Labor and labor leaders have been under attack the last few years. We must all stand with labor and help hold their arms up. We need a strong labor movement as the protector of the middle class.

Faith leaders can't do it alone. Religious leaders who stand on the forefront of social change are not always honored for their work. Jim Lawson, the architect of the sit-in movement, was kicked out of seminary. Dr. King and his young radical pastors marched out of their denomination. Nuns who care too much about poverty are under scrutiny from the Vatican. Most social justice positions in the mainline denominations have been eliminated. We must help hold up the arms of religious leaders who would stand on today's mountainsides.

There's a new union wave sweeping the land

Historically the path to worker justice despite entrenched power came in 19th century America through group action against the industrial giants, through strikes, street fights against hired militia and even deaths in protest marches to end child labor, unlimited workdays and horrible factory conditions.

It is not just a cute old poster that unions brought America the eight-hour day and weekends off. They did.

Now a new organizing wave is sweeping America. And it must dumfound the opposition.

WE'RE TELLING STORIES ABOUT THESE EFFORTS ON PAGE 16 because they represent a change that traditional union members will want to be part of, as many labor leaders now are growingly aware and active in.

The worker progress born in blood was codified by labor laws in the 1930s but still required big union action. Most unions regard these laws as too weak - not just because the blood still flowed but because of how the playing field remained tilted. But the laws created a difference and offered protection through federal departments and agencies.

Union power began making a social difference then. Labor money, those pennies and dollars of dues collected into every larger streams and rivers, could influence politics as well as supporting walkouts and strike funds. Those pennies each month could mount into important dollars through volume of workers employed. Though it never could match the other side, and has less chance now after the

Introduction

Citizens United and related unlimited corporate cash decisions, the funds served as a buffer against enormous wealth and social influence of established powers. Besides, the unions had right on their side and obviously still do -- otherwise can you imagine a nation embracing taxes on the rich to help jumpstart the poor and middle class?

But corporations can organize, too, and surely did. They became far slicker about working inside and outside the labor laws - or even mounting enough lobbying power to change those laws. The global checkers game gave them more ways to circumvent organized labor as did those changes they engineered in courts to allow unlimited anonymous corporate conduits.

The public remained skeptical, and still is, that businessmen focused on profit clearly had the common man's interest at heart. So even when some in labor became bloated with their own power and size, they always seemed petty compared to the indulgences and methods of the opposition.

But weaknesses took a toll. The ad blitz and their own blindness to faults hurt the image of unions. So organized labor found its power waning, attacked on all sides not as "too big to fail" - as we still say about Wall Street firms - but "too big to be allowed to continue."

No wonder their enemies sound so confident of eventually winning on the airwaves.

Now unavoidably comes the new wave. What the bad bosses are learning is that if you hurt people enough, if you lock too many doors against their advancement, the people will make everything old new again.

They'll defy the odds rather than give in. They rebuild their own communities and connections. Call it unionizing, call it something else. It's happening.

They gather into coalitions and raise a collective voice. They start their own businesses. They crystallize as "Occupy this" or "Occupy that." They form at work whatever the circumstance.

All these forces of diverse combat and social and technological shockwaves have melded. Both old unions and individual new bands of workers are finding fresh techniques and revitalized devices their opponents are struggling to deal with.

It is definitely not your father's union anymore - or even your mother's.

Not only are big unions changing their methods, adding new tools to old, they are far more willing to accept allies

from the non-union movements that share some of their principles in areas such as the ecology, immigration rights, health care, green technology and community development.

Some big changes ought to jump out at you in our accompanying roundup on Page 16 detailing recent events.

Large organized unions and labor federations may still be a part of the effort but are not always the operating motor. Often they have to be nimble to understand and accept new techniques.

The image of unions as aloof and concerned only about protecting their own members needs to undergo a sea change. They are often more concerned with helping workers improve their lives whether it leads to dues-paying membership or not. They are helping even in "right to work for less" states where their strength as unions is limited. In one such state, Nevada, the culinary unions have done such a good job explaining union strength to members that dues-paying is almost 100%, defying expectations of the right-wing.


Organized labor is reaching out, though outlets such as Working America, to help work-

The image of unions as aloof and concerned only about protecting their own members needs to undergo a sea change.

ers who by situation or numbers may not be able to even organize into a union but who clearly share the principles and dilemmas that caused unions to come into existence.

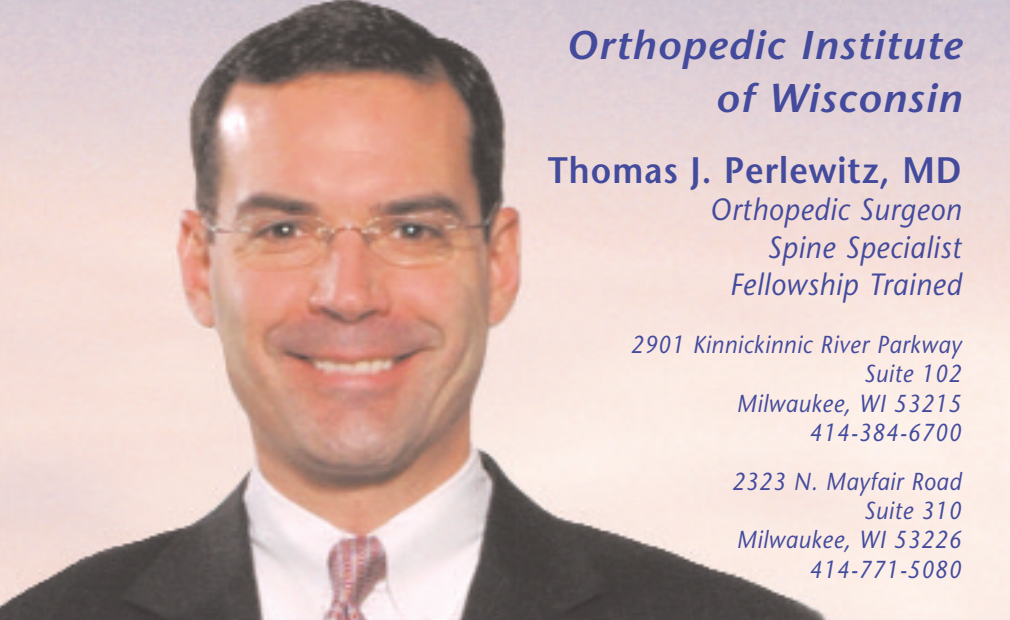
Such cooperation is essential in a society where worker productivity has escalated while wages have remained stagnant for decades, where the wealthy have too much money to wallow in and the workers too little to even survive.

Younger workers looking at this situation refuse to let their family values become part of this, so they and older workers are joining to fight back - almost as if they were reinventing the union movement.



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and the Executive Board of
UAW Local 469
Representing the Workers
at Master Lock Company
in Milwaukee*

Local 469

Charters

From Page 1

The small contingent of aldermen challenging knee-jerk charter approval are Tony Zielinski, Nik Kovac, Jose Perez and Bob Baumann.

Citizens are understandably confused about charter schools and the voucher school expansion in Milwaukee and Racine, which city property taxpayers do help pay for without direct say and that mainly religious groups operate as non-public schools with low standards of training for teachers hired - and fired. Disturbingly, many of the same players are involved, from Gov. Scott Walker down.

So let's do a charter primer.

In Milwaukee, different governmental units can authorize charter schools. The city itself and UWM approve charter schools but it is the city that is tied most closely to Howard Fuller, his Marquette University Institute for the Transformation of Learning and another organization he founded, the BAEO (Black Alliance for Educational Options).

Charter schools are also created under the Milwaukee Public Schools, but MPS keeps revenue in the city and keeps those student bodies included in the state aid funding formula for the school district.

However, this is not true of charter schools created by the city or UWM. The state's own legislative fiscal bureau spells out their lack of responsibility to local coffers: "These pupils are not counted by any school district for the purposes of revenue limits and aid membership."

So in these cases any rewards generated are not required for city or even state use, yet state taxpayer money pays for these charters. Nor are the students counted in the determination of state aid for the city school district, though charters are technically also public schools.

In contrast, MPS creates "instrumentality charters," which have union teachers and also "non-instrumentality" charters, which do not have union teachers but count attendees as MPS students for aid purposes. These "non-instrumentality" schools are not embraced but tolerated by the MTEA (teachers union).

"We support instrumentality charter schools that allow for creativity yet are closely tied to MPS and its initiatives," said MTEA President Bob Peterson. "We recognize that when a city charter school switches their charter to MPS, it helps the financial bottom line for children in Milwaukee."

Peterson went on to say, "This community has to understand that MPS is the only educational institution in the city that has the capacity, commitment and legal obligation to serve all students in Milwaukee."

Two other government entities have been approved to charter in the Milwaukee area but have not stepped heavily into the game - the Milwaukee Area Technical College not at all, and UW-Parkside, which has stuck a toe in the water.

Charters require review committees, but allow for-profit corporations to be subcontracted, which produces the danger of money under the table much like the old days of "rent a citizen" - a term famous from the era when cable companies competing for municipal business would hire public officials to lobby for them.

Of course, you don't have to accept money under the table since many charters pay leaders without public citizen review and their lobbying groups such as BAEO can help campaign efforts for friendly politicians.

The public - not just unaware of the profoundly different mechanisms of vouchers and charters though taxpayers pay for both - are also unaware of the lack of transparency. Even UWM, which at least has its educational departments pick the review committee, makes you dig to find out who these are, when they meet and how the public can attend.

MPS knows better. It is a traditional public system with open elections and regular required meetings. Other review committees can dodge open access but MPS makes sure their board committee are good about advance notice to discuss charter schools and hold public sessions with parents and other interested parties. Its members also know they face regular voter scrutiny, as many will next April.

Other government agencies seem to relish invisibility. "The city charter committee used to hold their meetings in Fuller's offices at Marquette until we kept complaining that wasn't kosher," laughs Herndon. "Then they moved to City Hall -- and you know how bad the acoustics are in those chambers. So no minutes, no mikes, no television broadcasts, no E-notify of the next meeting. But we keep showing up."

The conflict with community groups came to a head in November when Hines chastised citizens at a council meeting for letters to alderman objecting to one major charter approval, saying they should have spoken up at committee



MTEA President Bob Peterson and his wife, noted education writer Barbara Miner, at a recent event.

hearings - only to be reminded by letter that they were at those hearings and Hines as chair shut them down as his "prerogative" and even called security to eject one resident for objecting to the high-handed tactics.

This process can hardly be described as open but it allowed the city to ramrod through some powerful charter companies to run schools here, several also receiving federal grants through the state department of public instruction. Among the biggies are Fuller's Quest and Rocketship.

Fuller and some other charter programs also maneuver "umbrella" approval to open several schools under the same brand, advancing chances for multiple implementing \$250,000 grants (taxpayer money). When you unfold the Fuller umbrella some familiar failed voucher names fall out - along with a lot of taxpayer grant money.

In contrast, MPS has been forthright. It has turned down some distasteful schools first approved by the city -- such as AQS, which had a bad rep in Illinois and Indiana according to reports. So when MPS said no, AQS stepped back across the street and won approval from the city.

MPS is converting some existing schools into instrumentality charter operations but making deals with highly regarded companies that run "non-instrumentality" charters. One is Universal Milwaukee Community Charter School, from a Philadelphia company that already operates distant charter schools involving 4,000 students. Here it would start with 600 students and build each year into a full K-12, with 1200 students for MPS.

A big champion of Universal -- also an inner city real estate development company headed by Rahim Islam -- is MPS Superintendent Gregory Thornton, a Philadelphia transfer who saw firsthand its education successes.

Another "non-instrumentality" initiative is Milwaukee College Prep, which already runs three MPS charter schools and next year plans a fourth, K-8. MPS charter schools by negotiation are rigorously reviewed to close if they fail, scrutinized along the way with public input in both their selection and operation.

MPS has also received government grants to initiate charter operations MTEC School of Environmental Science, Northeast Campus School and Banner School. But when it comes to grants, MPS brings up the hind end compared to the city, where Quest and Rocketship each got \$250,000 and three UWM charter schools got \$600,000 -- Breakwater Lighthouse, Northwest Scholars and Woodlands School II. With more in the wings.

Some charter schools use Teach for America, a part of AmeriCorps and often promoted for the quality of its graduates from higher education. But statistics indicate most leave the teaching profession after the two year commitment -- another signal that the days of certified teachers as a lifelong profession are coming to an end and another reminder there is stick-to-itiveness value in seniority.

Now lower-paid teachers at charter schools are also starting to question what they've got themselves into. A non-union moderate made that point in an interview. "I may lose my job when I become too expensive to keep because of years of experience or this push for merit pay at a company concerned about profit share," he said. "So I could get fired the longer I stay and the minute I become better for students. So I may need to start looking now at helping my charter school form a teachers union."

Fuller connection floods city charter game

See report opposite page

The city's charter choice of Quest-Milwaukee -- despite detailed letters and opposition for conflict of interest and bad behavior from Marva Herndon's women's group -- surely raises specters of insider trading. The school's concept and outlines stem from Howard Fuller at Marquette University, a hidden decisive player in the city's charter approval process. Fuller is also a close political ally of key officials who appoint the steering committee. In contrast, the MPS selection process is more hands-off, refusing

involvement of its selection committee in charter institutions.

Another large city approved charter program - California's Rocketship Education - grew out of a Catholic parish and now is accused of suppressing spending on special education teachers. Here, too, the Fuller brush sweeps along. A leader of Rocketship is Deborah McGriff, Fuller's wife, considered a key component of his education philosophy and a leader of Edison School, a national charter for-profit operation that was bought out after years of financial and educational failure.

Range of educators upset

The growth in charter schools is doubly alarming to many education experts in both parties and on local levels. Even outside Milwaukee it is viewed as an echo of the city's failed voucher program, though the mechanics of funding are quite different. Other school districts actually benefit from Milwaukee's voucher funding through a complicated formula but know that won't last if vouchers are expanded beyond the city. Charter schools, they say, could damage everyone immediately.

"The voucher program is so lousy," one education insider told me, whose position in negotiations demanded confidentiality, "that you have to wonder what is possessing Walker and the MMAC (Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce) to keep wasting money on expanding it. Are they trying to prove that business people can waste money better than anyone else? Except maybe the charter people?"

And sure enough, a leader of the MMAC, Tim Sheehy, also sits on the Rocketship board, a charter that sailed through the city.

Said MPS board member Peter Blewett, "The students have to be enraged at the MMAC, at any people attacking not helping the critical skills they need to succeed. Don't think the students don't notice how the same people pushing them into charter and voucher schools are also trying to take away their right to vote."

MPS board member Larry Miller, while an outspoken liberal, echoes many conservatives in questioning why the state is creating yet another school district to siphon money without proof of success.

The charter school movement is "designed to flood the market and destroy true public education," he said. "MPS has lost \$8 million to charters in the last year - and while that may not seem as bad as the \$55 million that vouchers have cost us, it is growing."

"One reason we approve our own charters is self-defense," Miller adds, "since we keep the kids counted, influence their educational excellence and protect revenue. Our deal with Universal requires them to keep the money in Milwaukee."

The city charters have no such hooks. -- *Dominique Paul Noth*



Ald. Hines (left) in Labor Press photo and Howard Fuller in Marquette University photo - a coziness that alarms other officials and educators



Fuller also plays a strong role in state political decisions of determining and accrediting voucher schools, which brings these two diverse concepts - vouchers and charters -- uncomfortably close together, as does the lobbying participation of his BAEO group, particularly since BAEO members dominate the city charter committee.

Among those disconcerting connections: The city has also approved charters for CEO Leadership Academy, also connected to Fuller, a school that once had the reputation of worst performing Milwaukee voucher school - but eight years of such failure didn't cause the Common Council to hesitate in granting a charter.

A charter was also given to the Darrell Hines Academy though his brother, Ald. Willie Hines, appoints three of the city's charter controllers and is considered a close political ally of Fuller.

The city's charter public face? It's a phone number to submit a charter application.

Drill down into Legistar or the city's own website calendar and you will find who the board members of the charter school review committee are (though some of that is out of date and one appointee seldom shows up; the majority are members of Fuller's BAEO and/or come from Marquette or Stritch).

At the city the relationships with Hines smack critics as "destructive links" of politics and money. Three of the members are appointed by Hines. Three are appointed by Mayor Tom Barrett, who despite his nice guy reputation has a lot of fence mending with a suspicious education community that remembers his attempt to take over MPS two years ago and ques-

Getting involved

If you want to help Marva Herndon and Women Committed to an Informed Community, check out www.WomenInformed.org, email Women.Informed@gmail.com or call (414) 350-3027.

tions his judgment on approving city charter schools, they told me.

The member that no one seemed to object to was the CPA solely appointed by the city comptroller.

"Howard is quite a piece of work," said one often admiring fellow black activist who insisted on anonymity. "He was a powerful civil rights leader who got special dispensation to become MPS superintendent. But when he couldn't get it all his way working the inside, he bolted. Now he works the inside of other governments, all the people who hate MPS. I think he sincerely cares about educating minority children, but he's knocking down rather than weighing what he's doing."

Yet Fuller has succeeded in making MPS look better despite the political financial attacks that weakened its student numbers. You can find a successful voucher school here and there, but you can also find low income families now desperate to move back to MPS public schools, while Gov. Walker seeks to expand vouchers to cover more than the low-income families they were once aimed at. This move up in income scale actually chilled Fuller, to his credit, yet he continues to support expansion projects in charter and voucher schools that will quickly do more of the same.

The old Fuller the colleague remembers "would have been the first in the street protesting someone playing both sides of the fence."

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Wisconsin reacts to turmoil in Michigan

Anyone who thought economic facts or the will of the voters would modify the right-wing extremism and misguided belief in bad economic ideas -- well, they were clearly disappointed in December. In state after state, the righties continued attacks on health care, women's fundamental rights, voter rights and the mere existence of unions.

The battle is hardly over. It seems to be beginning again on new fronts requiring new strategies.

Michigan's rapid-fire approval of right to work for less legislation has become the primary example. It was blasted through in opposition to previous promises by the governor (I hope people who accepted Scott Walker's assurances that he would do no such thing in Wisconsin are watching) and in face of long-term economic evidence that workers as well as companies do far more poorly in "right to work for less" states.

Brushing aside massive protests by Michigan workers and a denunciation from President Obama, the GOP-run Michigan legislature jammed through a pair of so-called "right to work" laws Dec. 11 with GOP Gov. Rick Snyder reversing course and quickly signing the next day.

Workers jammed the state capitol building in Lansing, packed the galleries and took over the lawn, responded with horns, jeers, chants of "Kill the bill!" and promises to get even at the polls.

"Listen to the people!" Teamsters President James Hoffa shouted at the packed outdoor rally on Dec. 11. "Let the people decide!"

But since right-to-work's approval on party lines was a foregone conclusion, Hoffa promised that progressives would assure change by circulating petitions to get a vote repealing it onto the election ballot in 2014 - when Snyder will be up, too.

"We're going to repeal right to work for less forever," Hoffa declared.

The legislature had played it cute, though, passing the bill in a lame-duck session, knowing they might still have the majority later but not the votes. Not with the Democrats picking up five seats combined with pro-labor Republicans. To avoid an immediate ballot initiative, as worked in Ohio, they included an appropriation measure that will delay any voter effort at repeal until 2014 and require a higher signature threshold - 8% of the 2010 gubernatorial voter - to get on the ballot.

The law in effect will be in limbo for a couple of years anyway, and existing contracts will stall things. The thin possibility always exists that facts will finally get through to the right-wing. But the law also exists to create roadblocks, delays and squads of lawyers to play games, as the workers are starting to realize.

The lame-duck session of the legislature approved two right-to-work laws, one covering almost all public workers and the other covering all private sector workers. Both ban unions from negotiating clauses in contracts to



PARTICULARLY NOTICEABLE in Lansing was a delegation from Wisconsin, scene of another fight the last two years, over Walker's law ending collective bargaining rights for 200,000 state and local government workers. Walker won his law, and a recall election earlier this year, too. But major portions of that law have now been blocked in federal court and face more federal and state challenges. The Wisconsin workers' bus was plastered with the famous big blue raised fist poster, in the shape of Wisconsin, and its familiar 'We Are Wisconsin!' slogan - except the word Wisconsin was superimposed by a sticker labeled Michigan.

order dues collection to pay for union services, such as bargaining and grievances.

Unions are in effect barred from making non-union employees pay them for the contracts they negotiate with companies and perhaps from using company paychecks to collect dues. The right-wing promotes this as "freedom," but it's hard to see this as anything but "freeloading."

The practical effect is to weaken unions financially and thus lessen their power to bargain for good jobs with decent wages and benefits. If you don't have to pay a union for its work, why join? The right-wing is counting on the selfishness of the workers and the hunger to keep every quarter of their ever lowering pay, yet union bargaining power helps both union and non-union workers to better circumstances.

Obama, speaking at an auto parts plant in Detroit the day before, agreed. As president, he rarely steps into state politics, but he sure did here:

"What we shouldn't do - I just got to say this - what we shouldn't be doing is trying to take away your rights to bargain for better wages and working conditions. We shouldn't be doing that. These so-called 'right to work' laws, they don't have to do with economics. They have everything to do with politics. What they're really talking about is giving you the right to work for less money."

"We don't want a race to the bottom. We want a race

to the top."

Despite the big ad money on the other side, despite the outright lies promoted by FOX News that "right to work" was better for workers and the economy, Obama has both the moral principle and the facts right.

Multiple reliable studies have found that wages and benefits are lower in "right-to-work" states. The Economic Policy Institute found that right-to-work laws "are associated with significantly lower wages and reduced chances of receiving employer-sponsored health insurance and pensions." The institute estimated these laws decreased hourly wages by 3% for all workers. Other studies see a lot more loss over time.

Besides leading to lower pay and benefits "right-to-work" laws have had little impact on economic growth. You may also hear conservatives claim that unemployment is less in such states, which would not be a surprise given the willingness to hire anyone for any pay, but the facts are wrong here as well. The New York Times reported that "six of the 10 states with highest unemployment have right-to-work laws in place."

The widespread assertion that non-union members don't benefit from unions is wrong. The National Labor Relations Board reported that workers who choose not to pay union dues still receive protections from union contracts. Noted Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research: "The logic is straightforward. When a union is recognized as representing a bargaining unit it legally must represent every worker in that unit, whether or not a worker opts to join the union. . .

"What right-to-work laws actually guarantee is the ability for a worker to benefit from union representation without having to pay for union representation."

That has proven the real dilemma for union clout - and the actual political purpose of the laws. Americans for Prosperity, a Koch-paid group, threw pennies at union workers in Lansing jeering that was all a union could get them. That ignored the historical weight of union standards and the requirement of representing all. But those mocking pennies are indeed what the Koch boys fear, because in volume they mount up into the only financial power standing in their way.

"Right to work for less" intends to halt the money stream and the progress. But it is also becoming clear that workers will organize for a voice with or without unions. **SEE PAGE 16.** And the unions are part of a national movement for justice that makes the need to cooperate more important than leading. As one union leader told me, "We have the right message, but somehow we need to do a better job of explaining it."

-- Labor Press and Press Associates, Inc.

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 15.

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Wednesday, January 9
Monthly Delegate Meeting
6:30 p.m., Serb Hall, 5101 W. Oklahoma Ave.

Wednesday, January 30
Executive Council Meeting
2 p.m., 633 S. Hawley Rd.

Wednesday, February 6
Monthly Delegate Meeting
6:30 p.m., Serb Hall, 5101 W. Oklahoma Ave.

Tuesday, February 19
Primary Election
Polls open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Betrayal angers big paper

Forcing through "right to work for less" laws in Michigan (*story Page 14*) -- a state with the sixth highest density of union membership -- was outrageous and depressing. But it also proved galvanizing. It is waking up Republicans and moderates as well as labor, particularly as it exposed the hypocrisy of Gov. Rick Snyder.

He not only changed his mind from previous guarantees, he was a co-conspirator in pushing it through. He was clearly miffed because voters with labor backing had in November voted out his emergency manager law. But labor was so focused there, they did not spend a lot of effort on another measure - protecting collective bargaining as a state mandate - and once that measure lost, Snyder saw an opening even though the results were clearly not about "right to work for less."

The Detroit Free Press in one of the angriest front-page editorials in memory from a paper that had long supported and forgiven him bluntly said they were wrong to believe Snyder before and he had now broken promises and betrayed their trust:

"Michigan's governor has abdicated his leadership responsibilities to Republican legislators bent on vengeance. What reasonable person now believes that Snyder has the will or the wherewithal to deliver Michigan, or even his own party, from the failed politics of division?"

The editorial went after Snyder not just for betrayal but for being wrong on the facts:

"Snyder's right-to-work legislation is an attempt to institutionalize Republicans' current political advantage. Everything else is window dressing, and most of these diversionary talking points are demonstrably false.

"The argument that right-to-work status makes states more competitive or prosperous is refuted by a mountain of evidence that shows right-to-work states trailing their union-friendly counterparts in key metrics like per capita wealth, poverty rates and health insurance coverage.

"Snyder's contention that workers' First Amendment rights are compromised when a union they have freely elected to bargain on their behalf proposes a contract making union dues compulsory is equally specious. Employees are always free to reject such a contract or decertify the union that negotiated it, just as stockholders can force the ouster of corporate managers they deem unresponsive to their needs.

"Snyder has long acknowledged that steam-

rolling right-to-work legislation through the Legislature would have enduring negative consequences for productive collaboration between workers and employees. His decision to embrace such legislation now destroys, in an eye blink, the trusting relationship he and his business allies have struggled to establish.

"Snyder's closest brush with candor came when he suggested that his endorsement of right-to-work was less than voluntary -- a decision 'that was on the table whether I wanted it to be on the table or not.'

"But that is less an excuse than a confession that Michigan's governor has abdicated his leadership responsibilities to Republican legislators bent on vengeance.

"Michigan voters who provided Snyder's margin of victory in 2010 feel betrayed, and they have every justification."

The editorial's invective went further, saying the decision "yokes a governor who once aspired to be seen as a new kind of Republican with the most ideological, backward-looking elements of that party -- the very people whose exclusionary vision of the country's future was rejected by voters in last month's election."

Facts to push for a tax deal

Clearly timed to press Congress to do a deal, which may occur as we go to press, the president's council of economic advisers detailed the impact on retailers and the middle class if a deal isn't reached on retaining tax rates for the middle class.

New analysis by the President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) finds that allowing the middle-class tax rates to rise and failing to patch the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) could cut the growth of real consumer spending by 1.7% in 2013. This combination -- sharp rise in middle-class taxes and resulting decline in consumption -- would likely slow the growth of real GDP by 1.4%, consistent with Congressional Budget Office estimates.

The CEA estimates that consumers could spend nearly \$200 billion less than otherwise in 2013 just because of higher taxes. This reduction of \$200 billion is approximately four times the total amount that 226 million shoppers spent on Black Friday weekend in 2011 (figures for this year are still in the works). This \$200 billion reduction would likely be spread across all areas of consumer spending.

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Fast food walkout freshens labor movement

Worker power is advancing every day. Sometimes union inspired, but certainly union principled.

In New York City November 29, the lowest paid servers in the nation went on strike against fast food outlets - changing the game against all odds and forcing TV and newspapers to reveal some unsettling facts.

The myth that these fast food outlets relied on teenage workers or entry level end-of-the-liners disappeared under data reality engendered by the strike.

The average age of the city's fast food worker was 28. Some 65% are women, most in their thirties, many working moms, often single parents who were the family bread winners.

Managers deliberately kept them part-time to avoid full pay or the legalities of benefits and legal protection. Even in Manhattan, the average wage was \$8.72 an hour.

The strikers, some 300 in media head count hoping to inspire thousands of such workers in the metropolis, are asking

for \$15 an hour as a new minimum. They returned to work after a one-day walkout, often accompanied by community leaders, clergy and elected officials to ensure there would be no reprisals and clearly to elevate the likelihood of future protests.

When a manger tried to fire one fast-food worker, more than hundred people gathered within the hour outside the franchise to protest. (Welcome to the world of cell phones and tweets.)

Franchisers can't rely on the old ploy of saying pay levels are determined by the branding company - because the brand masters are the most vulnerable given the enormous profit margins and corporate revenue they've been reporting. The argument that \$15 an hour is too much fell away faced with simple equity and survival in the big city. It was also a forceful reminder how in the old days factory jobs were also low paid and abusive - until workers organized into unions.

As reported in depth by the New York Times' veteran labor reporter Steven Greenhouse,

organizers for the strike confronted outlets such as McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Taco Bell and Domino's. The New York City Central Labor Council provided assistance, but no big organized union was behind this. It was a grassroots effort.

If there was a real orchestrating power it was New York Communities for Change, a community organization that seeks out workforces that need help and gives them the tools to organize. It has been having considerable success among diverse groups from cabbies to home-workers.

Such grassroots efforts and coalitions are popping up everywhere, with and without organized labor support.

In Boston, taxi drivers -- mostly Haitian - gathered together in an association to attack workplace issues such as length of shifts, rate increases and crippling licensing fees. Cabbies are often blocked as they have been in cities like Milwaukee, by NLRB determination that they are independent contractors rath-

er than paid employees (because if they have a fortune they can buy their own cabs). But now these cabbies are changing the language and the modes of attack - and hence making gains as workers to better their circumstance.

In Austin, Tex., angered by the excessive tax incentives Travis County gave to firms like Apple, a coalition of students, sweatshop foes and unions went to work on elected officials to create a living wage base requirement of \$11 an hour for any contractor seeking to work in the county, union or not.

In effect Austin Interfaith and Students Against Sweatshops joined the Laborers, ATU, AFSCME, CWA and construction union councils to spearhead the effort - another signal of the cooperative changes underway.

In Los Angeles, Latino workers at Bonus Car Wash started a campaign for better working standards and unionizing. In 2011 as CLEAN Carwash Campaign, they won a union contract.

The National Guest worker Alliance (NGA) has now received special recognition and support from the US Department of Labor in its year-long fight against supply chain labor abuse stretching from worker abuse at huge desert facilities to unconscionable conditions in the Hershey's supply chain. (Hardly Kisses here). The NGA investigation of how these workers are treated forced a DOL agreement on new worker protection standards for those employed by warehouse operator

Exel Logistics, which operates more than 300 warehouses around the US.


Worker Centers backed by AFL-CIO

Meanwhile the national AFL-CIO has offered special status and protection for more than 200 worker rights centers around the nation, saying they are trying to make working lives better in a variety of ways and deserve to be respected regardless of the make-up and documentation of the people they support.

These centers are quite different from each other. Some are large nonprofits; they may or may not have a division to organize workers. Others are prominently about organizing. Some deal with policy issues, research and public access (such as hospitals, bilingual courts and schools).

One of the best known and most successful is right here in Milwaukee and now the largest Latino organizing movement in Wisconsin, Voces de la Frontera (Voices of the Frontier), which began 20 years ago when Christine Neumann-Ortiz started working for Latino justice issues as a GED teacher.

Today, as Labor Press explores in a Page One story, Voces is heavily involved in seeking a union for workers at Palermo Villa frozen pizza, with Neumann-Ortiz listed as the business agent for a union that is associated with the USW and engaged in a national boycott of Palermo pizza supported by the AFL-CIO.




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Are jobless benefits in negotiating limbo? They were as we write this

Negotiations between the White House and House speaker John Boehner were underway as Labor Press went to the printers, and the volatility of comment left even journalists confused. Would there be a short first deal followed by a bigger second one over time? That looked how it was falling out. But one corner of the country was dismayed, fearing leaving unemployment insurance to a

later day could be damaging. That was emphasized in a study released by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI). It found that 400,000 jobs could be lost if Congress fails to extend the federally funded extended Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits program when it expires at the end of 2012. The report directly attacks a popular premise on the extreme right - that the nation can't afford

the money. The reverse seems true - the nation's economy can't afford not to, even aside from the instinctive humanity of helping folks through hard times. The top unemployment return of a mere \$291 a week is what the right-wing is attacking though it has been defined by economists as a bargain price to keep the economy booming and prevent families from costing the taxpayers even more in other expenses, such as homelessness, emergency rooms and public safety nets.

Unemployment benefits not only provide a lifeline to unemployed workers struggling to get by, but also provide critical support for the economy, the EPI says, and it provided detailed statistics.

According to EPI, "economists widely recognize that extending unemployment benefits is one of the most effective tools for generating jobs in a downturn" because cash-strapped jobless workers immediately spend their UI benefits, and this spending generates activity throughout the economy. EPI worried that if Congress refuses to extend UI, the unemployment rate will be 0.3% higher in 2013.

The EPI report also explains that UI benefits remain critically necessary because long-term unemployment is still alarmingly

high and there are not enough jobs available to put all the long-term unemployed back to work: There are 5 million workers who have been unemployed for more than six months, which is more than four times the number of long-term unemployed in 2007, before the recession began. Furthermore, EPI statisticians revealed, 40.6% of unemployed workers have been unemployed for more than six months, a share more than 20 percentage points higher than the 2007 average of 17.5%. The labor market still faces a profound long-term unemployment crisis due to the damage inflicted by what is now being termed the Great Recession.

That unemployed workers continue to face extremely long spells of unemployment is no surprise given how dramatically unemployed workers outnumber job openings. The ratio of unemployed workers to job openings is 3.4-to-1, and has been 3-to-1 or greater since September 2008, according to established studies. A "job-seekers ratio" of more than 3-to-1 means there are simply no jobs available for more than two out of three unemployed workers. In other words, in a given month in today's labor market, the vast majority of the unemployed are not going to find a job no matter what they do.



THE LABOR SIDE can also wield some wicked humor, animation and insight for free on the Internet. A recent example used as an action tool - but also great fun - is "Tax the Rich: An animated fairy tale."

NARRATED WITH VIGOR and great humor by noted TV and movie actor (and progressive activist) Ed Asner, with animation by Mike Konopacki of Solidarity.com (the Madison based artist whose cartoons frequently appear in Labor Press), the 8 minute video was written and directed by Fred Glass for the California Federation of Teachers. It's both an informative and amusing journey through a land much like ours where the rich decide they don't want to pay taxes anymore and manipulate the common folk into helping them.

action.aft.org/c/374/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=5101.

But it can also be accessed directly on youtube.com/watch?v=cwg4DB-EeEA&feature=em-share_video_user.

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Law boosts city-made

It actually grew out of issues with the ant-sweatshop ordinance and enforceability, with the city attorney worried that turning down certain products could raise liability issues. The concerns came to a head recently with police uniform purchases from manufacturers in China who promised to heed the sweatshop rules fought for by the Milwaukee Clean Clothes Campaign, which was concerned at how seriously bureaucrats were taking the commitment to the "Sweat Free" effort.

One response came from longtime advocate of the clean clothes campaign, Alderman Tony Zielinski, who wondered if there was another way to push local jobs and manufacturing for the city. Out of this desire to emphasize local products and purchases came another ordinance with a new focus.

At first some thought Zielinski's idea more symbolic than decisive, but the city's own fiscal estimates indicate it will over two years change the way the city does business on more than 50 contracts it lets every year involving more than \$10 million. So it sped through the Common Council.

Mayor Barrett plans to approve the ordinance that goes into effect January 1 and there were two votes in opposition - mainly skeptics about the positive impact on local jobs. But that was broad approval November 27 as Zielinski got big backing to encourage more Milwaukee-made items for city purchase.

Carefully written to meet legal muster, the ordinance deals only with items costing more than \$30,000 as long as purchasing doesn't increase funding by more than 12%.

There are a number of technicalities that Zielinski believes encourages the creation of local jobs -- purchasing deals with items manufactured, mined or produced in the city with the cost of components made in Milwaukee to produce the goods exceeding 50% of the total cost. Road salt, petroleum, gravel and other so-called "commodity products" are carefully exempted from consideration.

-- Dominique Paul Noth



Tony Zielinski

Walmart product linked to deadly factory fire and systemic worker abuse in Bangladesh

A deadly fire in a Bangladesh garment factory that killed at least 112 workers has been linked to Walmart.

Photos from the scene of the fire show Faded Glory brand clothing, an exclusive Walmart label, was being manufactured and discovered amid the ruins of the fire.

A worker at right displayed the garments after the fire, in photos provided by the International Labor Rights Forum.

The evidence brought a quick rejoinder from Walmart though no denial.

The company instead expressed sympathy with the victims and claims that it had "terminated its relationship with the supplier."

Walmart said in the statement that the huge factory that burned down with workers inside unable to get out, the Tazreen Fashions Ltd. Factory, was no longer authorized to produce merchandise for Walmart at the time of the fire, but conceded that a supplier subcontracted work in Bangladesh "in direct violation of our policies."

Survivors of the fire said the fire extinguishers didn't work and the exit door was locked. It was one of several November garment plant fires in that country, but the one that created massive deaths. Newsday reported how "when the fire alarm went



A Bangladesh worker displays the Walmart brand after the fire. off, workers were told to go back to their sewing machines. Victims were trapped or jumped to their deaths from the eight-story building, which had no emergency exits."

Walmart's excuse was immediately called a dodge by labor rights groups, according to Josh Eidelson reporting in The

Labor group makes vivid linkage from Bangladesh fire to NY Triangle fire

Through the power of the Internet, a graphic video links the Triangle factory fire in New York City a century ago that radically changed US labor laws to what is happening in Bangladesh and the indifference to the same brutality that normal human outrage would stop.

The video from the Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights is at <http://www.youtube.com/nlcnct>


Nation. He interviewed Workers Rights Consortium Executive Director Scott Nova who said Walmart's "culpability is enormous."

"First of all they are the largest buyer from Bangladesh," said Nova. "They make the market."

Nova said Bangladesh has become the world's second largest apparel supplier "because they've given Walmart and its competitors what they want, which is the cheapest possible labor costs. So Walmart is supporting, is incentivizing, an industry strategy in Bangladesh of extreme low wages, non-existent regulation, brutal suppression of any attempt by workers to act collectively to improve wages and conditions. This factory is a product of that strategy that Walmart invites, supports, and perpetuates."

The base pay for a garment worker in Bangladesh is the equivalent of \$37 a month -- the monthly amount it costs to buy food for one person there. There were no local unions at the Tazreen Fashion factory to represent workers and ensure safe worksites.

Around 700 garment workers have been killed in dozens of fires since 2006, according to the Clean Clothes Campaign, an Amsterdam-based textile rights group.




Happy Holidays from the United Steelworkers !

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Good Jobs First data spurs major series

In a stunning comprehensive and startling economic analysis of the nation's tax realities published November 30 in the New York Times, the facts contradict the impression many people have that they are paying more now than in the past for the expansion of the federal government, a key argument for the right wing resisting tax increases on the rich.

It ain't necessarily so, the thorough investigation revealed, exploring data and actuarial factors from honored sources.

"Most Americans in 2010 paid far less in total taxes - federal, state and local - than they would have paid 30 years ago," the report concluded. "The combination of all income taxes, sales taxes and property taxes took a smaller share of their income than it took from households with the same inflation-adjusted income in 1980."

The report was related to but preceded an astonishing new series by the newspaper, "United States of Subsidies," which provides frightening details to how states have competed with each other for business and spent (more accurately wasted) \$80 million in tax incentives, free land, sales tax givebacks as cities and towns attempt to buy business, fearing over-seas loss but



Good Jobs First Greg LeRoy during a Milwaukee conference actually at war with neighboring states.

There is an interesting connection behind the newspaper's series --- it is with credit using database mining from the work of a long major force in smart economic development, Good Jobs First, founded by Greg LeRoy. This is a group heavily involved in urban advances in Milwaukee and around the nation.

The Times has acknowledged the value to its writers of Good Jobs First's Subsidy Tracker database containing previously unpublished data from

state and local government agencies via open records requests.

The Times analysis revealed that households earning more than \$200,000 benefited from the largest percentage declines in total taxation as a share of income. But middle-income households benefited, too. More than 85% of households with earnings above \$25,000 paid less in total taxes than comparable households in 1980.

Lower-income households, however, saved little or nothing, the study confirmed. Many pay no federal income taxes, but they do pay a range of other levies,

like federal payroll taxes, state sales taxes and local property taxes. Only about half of taxpaying households with incomes below \$25,000 paid less in 2010 than 30 years earlier.

The reported noted two contradictory trends. Congress cut federal taxation at every income level over the last 30 years while state and local taxes increased for most Americans. In other words, the NY Times was suggesting, people are looking in the wrong direction on who to blame if they feel a tax burden.

Other studies note widespread confusion about the marginal tax rates and what President Obama is truly suggesting in remarks about returning the top 2% to the tax rates of the Clinton era. Even in that concept, all earning

Americans receive lower taxes on incomes.

For the very rich, the marginal tax formula means that income up to \$250,000 is at the lower rate and higher rates only kick in on earnings above that, a small percentage increase in any event. In its subsidies series, the newspaper exposes how politicians and local business groups have been bamboozled into enormous giveaways of taxpayer money for little reward in new jobs.

Good Jobs First is a non-profit, non-partisan partisan resource promoting accountability in economic development and smart growth for working families.

It was founded in 1998 and is based in Washington, DC.

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