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U.S. | Labor & Workers

Waging War on Working Americans
 by Stephen Lendman
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worker struggles

Waging War on Working Americans - by Stephen Lendman

Outside the beltway, ground zero is Wisconsin, but worker rights are threatened across America, including by the Obama administration's spurning them since taking office in January 2009. While giving at least \$12.4 trillion to Wall Street crooks and hundreds of billions more to other corporate favorites, he stiff-armed budget-strapped states and local governments, especially in the current fiscal year, leaving them on their own sink or swim.

He also did little for distressed households. Promising millions of new jobs, he created few, leaving real unemployment over 22% more than three years after economic crisis began.

Moreover, he provided little popular aid overall, and facilitated Wall Street's home foreclosure racket, involving fabricated documents, forgery, perjury, lost paperwork, and "rocket docket" eviction speed throughs lasting 20 seconds on average. He also froze federal worker wages and plans sweeping austerity for working households, while showering business and America's aristocracy with generous tax breaks and other handouts.

The way reactionary governors and mayors hammer their residents, Obama is doing to America. He's no friend of labor. In mid-February, he cynically told Milwaukee's WTMJ television that:

"Everybody's got to make some adjustments to new fiscal realities," claiming worker sacrifices are necessary to "save jobs" when, in fact, they're killing them and driving millions into poverty from wage and benefit cuts. At the same time, corporate profits are better than ever, achieved on the backs of hammered workers, swindled by a Washington-business cabal, sacrificing people for marketplace sovereignty - a government-sponsored racket.

Overall, Obama pretends to support workers. In fact, he spurns them, his vague, tepid rhetoric a dead giveaway for supporting class warfare, including harsh measures to quell dissent.

Extremist Think Tanks and Media Assault Worker Rights

Numerous right-wing think tanks infest America's landscape, generously funded by conservative foundations, including Koch Family Foundations (established by David, Charles and Claude R. Lambe), several Scaife ones, John M. Olin Foundation, Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Smith Richardson Foundation, various others, and George Soros' Open Society Foundations, pretending to be liberal, when, in fact, he supports everything smelling money.

Their agenda includes marketplace sovereignty, deregulation, privatization of government services, ending popular entitlements, social spending, and affirmative action, prioritizing business friendly policies, waging class war, controlling electoral politics and supportive media backing everything on their wish list.

Among many others, their beneficiaries include the American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, Club for Growth, Federalist Society, Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute for

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Waging War on Working Americans : I...

Policy Research, and Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, founded in 1919 by Herbert Hoover, best known for inaction while America sank into depression while he was president.

Its notorious members include Condoleezza Rice, George Shultz, Edwin Meese, Margaret Thatcher, William Perry, Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Michael Boskin, James Woolsey, Christopher Hitchens, Milton Friedman until he died, and Robert Barro - his Wall Street Journal op-ed attacking collective bargaining discussed below, typical of what Hoover members advocate.

Its mission statement endorses representative government, private enterprise, its definition of peace and personal freedom, and safeguarding America's system, benefitting wealth and power, not popular, interests.

Herbert Hoover's 1959 statement guides policy, saying:

America's "social and economic systems are based on private enterprise from which springs initiative and ingenuity....Ours is a system where the Federal Government should undertake no governmental, social or economic action, except where local government, or the people, cannot undertake it for themselves. (Safeguarding) the American system, (based on) individual, economic, and political freedom; private enterprise; and representative government" is fundamental to bedrock Hoover principles, ones very much anti-labor.

So were Milton Friedman's. He said markets work best unfettered by rules, regulations, onerous taxes, trade barriers, "entrenched interests" and human interference, and the best government is practically none at all as anything it can do private business does better. Democracy and government of, by and for the people? Heresy for Friedman, an ideology he taught and endorsed.

He felt public wealth should be in private hands, accumulation of profits unrestrained, corporate taxes abolished, and social services curtailed or ended. He believed "economic freedom is an end to itself....and an indispensable means toward (achieving) political freedom." He opposed foreign aid, subsidies, import quotas, and tariffs, as well as drug laws he called a subsidy to organized crime. It's also one for money laundering banks, especially major Wall Street ones, profiting hugely by doing it.

He favored a constitutional amendment requiring Congress balance the budget because deficits "encourage political irresponsibility." He claimed taxes were onerous and "favor(ed)...cutting (them) under any circumstances and for any excuse, for any reason, whenever possible...." He wanted corporations exempted from them. He opposed the minimum wage, supported a flat tax for the rich, and believed everyone should have to buy his or her own medical insurance like any other product or service.

He opposed public education, supported school vouchers for private ones, and believed marketplace competition improves performance even though voucher amounts are inadequate and go mostly to religious schools, breaching America's inviolable church-state separation.

He also wanted Social Security and Medicare privatized and vocally opposed unions, saying "high" wages and benefits harm everyone, including workers. Extremist economists like him endorse the same policies, wanting America returned to 19th century harshness. Acolyte Robert Barro is one.

On February 28, his Wall Street Journal op-ed headlined, "Unions vs. the Right to Work," saying:

"Labor unions like to portray collective bargaining as a basic civil liberty, akin to the freedoms of speech, press, assembly and religion," mocking the most fundamental labor right without which no others exist.

As enacted in the landmark 1935 Wagner Act, it lets unions bargain collectively with management on even terms, a goal never achieved and now gravely weakened after decades of major erosion.

Ideally, however, collective bargaining provides a level playing field to resolve worker-management conflicts, and, as such, represents an equitable industrial jurisprudence system, by including civil rights issues and establishing them in workplaces.

It thus counters one-sided management authority, limits its arbitrary decision making, strengthens worker rights, increases their self-respect, morale and productivity, enhances unionism, promotes fairness, and facilitates equitable labor-management resolutions, benefiting both sides by establishing open communications to achieve workplace harmony and peace.

Not according to Barrow who calls it "more similar to an antitrust violation than to a civil liberty," an astonishing mischaracterization by a Harvard economist, playing politics, not sound economics left out of his assessment.

Pre-1935 when labor had no rights, they were subject to (1890) Sherman Antitrust Act guidelines, removed by the 1914 Clayton Antitrust Act and Wagner Act (the 1935 National Labor Relations Act).

Barro endorses (1947) Taft Hartley Act legislation, letting states pass right-to-work laws. Twenty-two mostly Southern and Western ones now have them, prohibiting union-management agreements making membership or union dues an employment condition, before or after hiring.

Barro's convoluted reasoning claims the right to work trumps worker rights, and besides: it "has a much more pleasant, liberal sound than 'collective bargaining.' "

So does neoliberal, an extremist ideology Barro endorses, advocating marketplace sovereignty, profits over people, a large reserve army of labor to restrain wages and benefits, privatizing state resources, deregulation, slashing social services, and militant enforcement when necessary.

Current legislation in Wisconsin, Ohio and other states, says Barro, "stems from the collision between overly generous benefits for public employees - notably for pensions and health care - and the fiscal crises of state and local governments," omitting that years of Wall Street shenanigans created them.

"Teachers and other public-employee unions went too far," said Barrow, another astonishing misstatement, contrary to facts he ignores. Public workers, in fact, are under, not over-compensated compared to their private sector counterparts.

Using Census Bureau data, a National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS) study titled, "Out of Balance? Comparing Public and Private Sector Compensation Over 20 Years" concludes:

"Wages and salaries of state and local employees are lower than those for private sector employees with comparable earnings determinants, such as education and work experience. State workers typically earn 11 percent less and local workers 12 percent less."

"During the last 15 years, the pay gap" widened. The pattern holds for most large states. "Benefits make up a slightly larger share of compensation for the state and local sector." Nonetheless, based on total compensation, state workers earn 6.8% less, and for local ones it's 7.4%.

University of Wisconsin-Madison Economics Professors Keith Bender and John Heywood co-

authored the study, saying:

"These public sector employees earn less than they would earn if they took their skills to the private sector."

Maybe Barro should enroll in one of their classes to learn real economics he doesn't know or teach, his students losing out from a man endorsing union-busting extremism, calling Wisconsin's bill "fiscal reality." In fact, it's fiscal fascism, substituting right-to-work zealotry for collective bargaining fairness.

No matter. Barro concludes saying, "Hopefully embattled politicians like Gov. Walker will maintain their resolve and achieve a more sensible long-term structure for the taxpayers in their states."

Many of them, in fact, are public employees, the same ones making the state work. Like all working Americans, they deserve fair pay and benefits for it, not Barro's "fiscal reality," heading them for neoserfdom if enacted.

NIRS's entire study can be accessed through the following link:

<http://www.slge.org/vertical/Sites/{A260E1DF-5AEE-459D-84C4-876EFE1E4032}/uploads/{03E820E8-F0F9-472F-98E2-F0AE1166D116}.PDF>

A Final Comment

Countering Walker's intransigence, Wisconsin public workers are considering a general strike to shut down the entire state. He threatened firings and layoffs. Challenging him is crucial, standing firm, holding the line, and beating him at his own game, as well as discrediting him and fellow Republicans endorsing his scheme.

Walker also slapped \$100 a day fines on absent Democrat senators and ordered them arrested for walking out, charged with "contempt of the Senate." In fact, Walker wreaks of it, defiling public workers for big money backers demanding it. So do fellow Republicans and Democrats. Despite walking out, they caved on making workers pay more and weakly supporting collective bargaining rights because their constituents demand them.

Notably, the Madison-based Cullen Weston Pines & Bach law firm explains that "the Wisconsin Constitution absolutely prohibits members of the (state) Senate from being arrested for non-criminal offenses. The Wisconsin Senate action today (is invalid by) the law of this state." Moreover, if arrests are made, Republican legislators and Gov. Walker may be subject to contempt charges for violating state law, including a statute protecting public officials from this type chicanery, including fining absent senators \$100 a day.

Battle lines remain drawn. Thursday night, Dane County Circuit Judge John Albert ordered protesters out of the Capitol. Most remained at first because his ruling said the state violated the public's free speech and assembly rights by restricting access to the building. Later they left. No arrests were made. Resolution remains nowhere in sight, but sustained protester courage demands universal support for their rights. Their struggle is ours.

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