

Democrats and Labor: A Tale of Abuse

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The Democratic Party's participation in the recent national "sequester" cuts is yet another big dent in their love affair with organized labor. But break-ups are often a protracted process. Before a relationship ends there is usually a gradual deterioration based on irreconcilable differences, until the split becomes inevitable. The decades-long marriage of labor unions and the Democratic Party is nearing such a divorce. Labor unions are becoming frustrated as the Democrats flaunt their affair with corporate America and Wall Street.

What are some of the issues driving towards separation? It just seems that no matter how much labor leaders shower the politicians with money and affection, the Democrats just aren't returning the love.

Although the Democrats were always a fickle partner, their coldness evolved into aggression under Bill Clinton, who oversaw a slew of anti-worker legislation, most notably NAFTA and welfare "reform."

Obama has continued this rightwards trajectory, while portraying himself brilliantly as the "lesser evil" compared with the more honest anti-union rhetoric of the Republicans. He fulfilled none of his promises to labor in 2008, and essentially ignored all labor issues in his 2012 campaign. Labor leaders misinterpreted Obama as playing "hard to get," when in fact the Democratic Party had already moved on.

To prove his fidelity to his new crush, Wall Street, Obama has made it a pet project to target the most powerful union in the country — the teachers' union — for destruction. Obama's innocent-sounding Race to the Top education reform is in actuality an anti-union dismembering of public education, with its promotion of charter schools and its mass closings of public high schools that Obama labels as "failing." Bush, Jr.'s anti-union No Child Left Behind looks innocent compared to Obama's education "reform."

In fact, Obama has overseen the worst environment for organized labor since Ronald Reagan. But the problem is bigger than Obama. It's the entire Democratic Party. For example, Democratic governors across the United States continue to work in tandem with Republicans in weakening public employee unions — the last bastion of real strength in the labor movement.

The Democrats have chosen to blame labor unions for the economic crisis and the consequent budget deficits affecting the states. These deficits have been used to attack the wages, health care, and pensions of public employees on a state-by-state basis, fundamentally weakening these unions while skewing the labor market in favor of the employers.

What some labor leaders fail to understand is that political parties like the Democrats are centralized organizations that share certain beliefs, and execute these ideas in a united

fashion. It isn't merely a coincidence that every Democratic governor in the United States has chosen a similar anti-labor path, its policy. There has been a fundamental shift in the Democratic Party's relation to labor unions, and it is on display for everyone to see.

Not all labor leaders are feigning blindness to these facts. The president of the nation's largest teachers' union, [Dennis Van Roekel](#), summarized teachers' experience with the Obama Administration:

"Today our members face the most anti-educator, anti-union, anti-student environment I have ever experienced." He was referring largely to Obama's above-mentioned Race to the Top education program.

Van Roekel's union, the National Education Association (NEA), also passed an excellent resolution at their national convention blasting Obama's Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, for his anti-public education and anti-union policies.

But of course Arne Duncan is simply implementing the policies of his boss, President Obama. And Obama is simply implementing the policies of his boss, corporate America, which is insisting that market relations are imposed on public education. After passing the above resolution, the NEA leadership shamefully pressured its membership to campaign for the Obama Administration, akin to a survivor of domestic violence going to bat for the batterer.

The president of the large national public employee union American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), [Lee Saunders](#), also lashed out against the Democrats recently:

I am sick and tired of the fair-weather Democrats. They date us, take us to the prom, marry us, and then divorce us right after the honeymoon. I am sick and tired of the so-called friends who commend us when they're running for election, but condemn us after they've won. I am sick and tired of the politicians who stand with us behind closed doors, but kick us to the curb in front of the cameras. I'm here to tell you that's bullshit and we're not gonna take it anymore.

Accurate remarks, but they were limited to a couple of select Democratic mayors and governors. Again, there is more than a "few bad apple" Democrats who are anti-labor; the whole party is sick with this cancer.

In private, all labor leaders acknowledge this fact. [Politico](#) reports:

Top labor leaders excoriated President Barack Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in a closed session of the AFL-CIO's executive board meeting...Furious union presidents complained about budget cuts, a new [free] trade agreement and what some view as their abandonment, even by their typically reliable allies among Senate Democrats.

Presidents of several unions and an AFL-CIO spokesman declined to repeat their private criticism to a reporter Tuesday, a sign that labor feels it must still try to maintain a relationship with the Democratic Party, even if it's deeply troubled.

So while the presidents of these unions speak honestly amongst themselves, they feel obligated to mis-educate their membership about the above facts. Labor leaders consistently minimize the Democrats' role in anti-union policies, while exaggerating any

morsel that can be construed to be pro-union. A mis-educated union membership makes for a weakened union movement.

When President Obama gave a largely right-wing state of the union address that included more corporate free trade agreements, more education “reform,” cuts to Medicare, and no plan to address the ongoing jobs crisis, AFL-CIO President [Richard Trumka](#) responded shamefully by saying:

Tonight, President Obama sent a clear message to the world that he will stand and fight for working America’s values and priorities.

Again, Trumka knows better. He should tell union members the truth. The AFL-CIO and other unions have lied about President Obama’s role in the national “sequester” cuts, blaming the whole thing on the Republicans. The truth, however, is that Obama formed the “the deficit reduction committee” that gave birth to the sequester. He failed to take any significant action to prevent the cuts, because he agrees with them.

Rank-and-file union members aren’t stupid. They realize it when their paychecks shrink, when their health care costs skyrocket, when their pensions are destroyed, when they’re laid off, or when they campaign for Democrats who betray them post-election. Union leaders are creating distrust within their membership as they continue down a political road that has left labor weakened and politically tied to a “partner” that’s abusing it.

The Democrats have gone “all in” with Wall Street and the corporations. The big banks now feel as comfortable throwing campaign donations towards the Democrats as the Republicans. Labor unions can’t compete with Wall Street’s cash.

Breaking with the Democrats is long overdue. And once this is done union members will likely choose the path taken by labor unions in nearly every developed country: the creation of a labor party, with its own platform, funding, and member activists.

Such a party could appeal directly to all working people by demanding that a federal jobs program be immediately implemented to put those unemployed to work as well as fighting to save and expand Social Security and Medicare, while taxing the rich and corporations to fully fund public education and other social services. Such a platform would create a massive contrast to the mainstream corporate-bought parties that exist today, and thus attract millions of members and millions more voters.

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